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SO VERY HUMAN

A Tale of the Present Day.

BY

ALFRED BATE RICHARDS.

'Αμφὶ δ'ὀφθαλμοῖς φόβος.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SO VERY HUMAN.

CHAPTER I.

A JEWEL IN A ROUGH SETTING.

The old merchant took from a worn and greasy purse a small packet of folded linen of such dingy hue and unwholesome aspect, that it looked like a shred which had escaped the flames in the sweepings of a leper's hut, or a decayed fragment of dress detached in the last shiver of an expiring pauper, and left at some closed workhouse door in the night, a contribution to the huge rag-mill of civilised greed. Carefully unfolding this uninviting cover, the hoary trafficker in gems exhibited a diamond of such surpassing lustre, that it would have made the mouth of ducal Brunswick water, while worthy of being pawned by the princely hand of an Esterhazy himself. "Ha!" he cried, as the jewel flashed the brighter for his trembling grasp, "you Christians judge everyting by his outward dress, but vere sall you find soche a treasure in a monarch's heart? Ven you find him, listen to old Posnăi—keep him and sherish him ash your lifes. He is more precious dan dis stone, vorn in de scimitar-hilt of de caliphs, more rare dan your fatal 'Mountain of Light,' baptised, as you call it, in de plood of dusky thousands—tyrants mit deir soldiers, ploonderers mit deir slafes."—*Stories of Unlettered Graves. Story III., chap i.*

"YOU'RE a spicy hinvestment, you air," observed a curious-looking individual, apparently addressing a new street besom, as he threw it down, with an air of great exasperation, in the centre of a clean crossing nearly opposite St. George's Church, Hanover-square,

about three P.M. on a Saturday afternoon, just three years after the events which we have narrated in the preceding volume. "Not a drop of blessed rain 'as fell, since I took to this ere bis'ness," he continued. "It couldn't be wus, hif I'd bin and prayed agen vet veather, like the Harchbishop of Middlesex hisself, hassisted by the hunited clargy of Hengland; not that I never saw no good cum of their hinterference with the veather horfice. As if they wos humpires of wot the correct card orter be, and could work the horacle hever so much better than Natur. It's wot I calls cheek, and no mistake, to be heverlastin' axing Providenx for sumthin'; and findin' fault with this, and worritin' about t'other. It's wot the nobs don't take from we. Jest think, hif I was to ring the Prime Minister's airey bell, much less cum a double knock at his front door, and ax him jest to stop his huniwersal tackses, 'cos I wanted to keep a brace of bull-pups, or vun either, for that matter. I expex I should werry soon find my road to quod special. Holloa! here's a swell a comin'! Now then, show yer muscle, will yer, and wot yer could do, hif the streets wos muddy."

And with this injunction to himself, the individual picked up his besom and began to sweep the clean road with a series of flourishes, that would have done justice to the most talented pantomimist, about a yard in front of a portly and well-to-do personage. The latter said, somewhat good-humouredly:

"Confound you, don't raise the dust in that manner."

"Ax yer pardin. I wish yer honour'd come down

with it," was the ready rejoinder. "It's very dry, sir."

"Yes, you idle rascal, and that's why you've no business here," observed the other.

"No bis'ness?" was the reply, "ven I bought the goodwill of this ere harrystocratic station for 'arf a couter and a pint of rum honly last Vensday!"

"You've no business here on a fine day like this, I tell you," rejoined the gentleman.

"If you'd written to say you wos a comin', I'd a looked at my barromyter," replied the incorrigible crossing-sweeper. The gentleman laughed and tossed him a penny, which he caught, spit on, and pocketed, calling out after his patron, "Thank ye, sir; it's the first 'arf-pint I've raised this blessed arternoon. If you'll send a tellygraf the next hout-and-hout vet mornin', I'll lay down some red carpeting for yer, and bring my very best silk humbereleer with the mother-o'-pearl 'andle."

So saying, the individual abandoned himself to a fresh ebullition of sweeping, as if it were a matter of conscience quite essential to his peace of mind.

We shall now attempt to describe the appearance of the "Downy;" for such was the appellation by which he was known to the circle of his private and public acquaintance, to which some added the patronymic of "Cove," making his total nomenclature the "Downy Cove," or, as he would frequently insist upon it, "Downy Cove, Eskvire, gent at large, and of nowheres else pertickler." He was a thin, very pale, and, if one could possibly use such a term, fair young man, of any age from twenty-four to

thirty, or upwards. He looked as if he had been rained upon all his life, until all the colour had been washed out of him, and then well ingrained with dirt during a particularly dry summer. He gave you the idea also of being in the last stage of inanition and consumption, whereas his constitution was in reality of iron, and his strength enormous. He would shoulder weights, and carry them with ease, under which men of herculean build would stagger. As for wet or cold, he could apparently defy the elements. He very seldom enjoyed an opportunity of taking off his clothes; and no amount of generosity on the part of any one had ever been known to improve his dress, for the reason that he invariably turned any contribution of this kind into money with the utmost despatch. To this man comfort was utterly unknown—we mean in the sense usually attached to it. He had his little comforts; but they were chiefly connected with the delights afforded by a tenth-rate public-house. Gin was his weakness, and skittles his forte. He was not a drunkard—partly from necessity and partly from choice. But if he took one glass of gin, which he was not always prevailed upon to indulge in, and could get more, the desire of which was an inevitable consequence, then he would become

O'er all the ills of life victorious.

So thoroughly jolly, so supremely happy, and so superlatively good-natured, though disposed to be argumentative and patronising on such occasions, was he, that policemen have been known to abstain

from taking him into custody, while stern and sullen landlords would relax occasionally from the severe discipline regulating their public department, and allow him to remain after all his money was expended, and even sleep on a bench in the tap-room, instead of turning him out into the street on a rainy or foggy night. Nor was this altogether disinterested on their part; for his "company" was so much esteemed, on account of his conviviality and humour, that he frequently greatly increased the demand for "'arf-pints" and "twopennorths." Deeply impressed with the conviction that honesty is not the best policy in this world, according to his experience, he yet possessed the merit of being scrupulously honest.

Just before the period of our introduction to him, the "Cove" had lost what he called a "reg'lar hincome" derived from window-cleaning and carpet-beating in the Temple, owing to the new police regulations of the Inn, and the introduction of a more pretentious rival, so that he was in a very forlorn and dilapidated condition, even for him.

His birth and parentage were mysteries which he never revealed. Probably he could not. We do not believe that he ever enjoyed even the advantage of a workhouse baptism. He had escaped registration and dodged the Census. It must be owned that he was an exceedingly clever and handy fellow. He was a carpenter, locksmith, whitesmith, and blacksmith; he could put down a carpet or put up blinds and curtains against any man. His chief glory, however, lay in moving furniture, especially if the job was what he called "special;" that is, one which

required secrecy and despatch—in short, a flitting. We are afraid that our honest friend's sympathies were rather on the side of tenant than landlord, on these occasions; but this was mere sympathy with the poorer and weaker side. Yet this pariah of civilisation, this Arab of the streets, had done things, for which he was virtually entitled to the Victoria Cross and the Royal Humane Society's gold medal. Once, at the imminent risk of his life, he saved half a dozen human beings, chiefly children, from being burnt to death, and the praises of the firemen, very gallant fellows, no doubt, but not the right recipients of praise or bounty on this occasion, were duly recorded in the papers. As for the Downy, all that he got was hearty abuse, and the threat of being locked up by an active and intelligent "officer" of the C Division, who displayed remarkable energy in endeavouring to prevent any life from being saved at all. This useful guardian of the public peace and morals was possessed of a leading idea, namely, that no one, save a fireman, ought to enter a house in flames, though its inmates were screaming for aid from a top window; and as no one save the Downy seemed inclined to enter, he was for some time thrust back by the active and intelligent officer, whereby three lives were actually lost. The policeman was rather complimented than otherwise on the inquest; and the absent Downy was described as a young man somewhat active on the occasion; but, as the policeman roundly declared, a well-known associate of thieves. The poor fellow was laid up, severely burnt, for at least three weeks in the hospital. He had saved many persons from

drowning, especially in winter, in Hyde Park, where he was a distinguished character for sweeping, sliding, skate-fitting, and facetiousness. Once he plunged in when a wholesale immersion had taken place; and some wretched urchin stole his coat, cap, and waistcoat, which happened to be a little better than usual. It may be thought that, after saving no less than five persons on this occasion, and for a time actually losing the free use of his limbs in consequence, from which he miraculously recovered, something would have been done for him. No! the "active and intelligent officers," who were ready to take the drowning persons into custody, if they could have got at them, and a brace of officials of the Rescue Society, who would neither stir themselves nor let any one else have the use of their ropes and appliances, divided all the honour and profit among themselves. We beg pardon, not all, for Bumbledom had its share. The master and matron of the workhouse where the bodies were laid out got one hundred guineas and a handsome tea-service for acting respectably under the public gaze on the occasion, on the day that the crippled Downy got a sovereign out of the poor-box from the "worthy and benevolent magistrate" to whom his case was made known. There was some vague talk started by disinterested spectators of procuring him the *bronze* medal of the R.H.S.; but the Downy "didn't seem to see it," to use his own expression. In fact, he looked upon the proposition rather in the light of an insult than otherwise. Had Her Most Gracious Majesty been made acquainted with the circumstances through a proper channel, it

is probable that he would have received another pound, but she was not. It may be thought that all this would have embittered his disposition, and made him cynical and morose. Not a bit of it. He was as ready to dash into a burning house, or plunge amidst broken ice into sixteen feet of water, as ever. It imbued him with some degree of contempt for the institutions of his country, that was all, and about these at times he would express himself somewhat strongly.

"Holloa!" quoth this remarkable individual to a wretched-looking girl with a few bunches of faded flowers in her hands. "Whose garden was you robbin' last Friday was a fortnight? Surely you don't hexpect to find hany vun green enough to buy that lot, do yer? They looks as hif they'd been worn by the female patients in Bedlam, and then been slep upon by a workus hundertaker's man as died in a fit of blue ruin."

The girl looked at him vacantly; but replied nothing, as she feverishly and nervously sorted and twisted her faded store.

"Come, young woman," continued the Downy, "I didn't mean no reflexshuns upon yer bis'ness. It ain't no wusser nor mine, I'll lay a penny. There, I didn't mean to hurt yer feelinx. Stop them water-works."

"Mother's a dying, and I haven't taken a farthing to-day," sobbed the girl. "The doctor said she was to have wine, and we haven't a bit of food to give her, and I'm that tired I don't believe I can get home—indeed I don't."

"You're a honfeelink brute, Downy, that's wot you air," said the Cove, addressing himself, as was his wont sometimes. "If I'd got it, vich I haven't, you should 'ave sumthink to take 'ome, my dear," he said; "and if you'll wait here now, till I gets a stroke of luck, blowed if yer shan't go 'arves, that's all about it. Set down on them steps; here's a gent a comin' in a precious hurry, and no mistake."

As he said this, no less a personage than the amiable Mr. Grinderby came up "at the double," much in the style of an elderly Volunteer as depicted in the French "Charivari."

"Here, you fellow," he said, as soon as he could get breath enough to speak, "is there a cab-stand hereabouts?"

"Get you vun in a brace of jiffies, guv'nor, if you'll wait, and put yer bag down a minnit," was the reply.

Mr. Grinderby gruffly assented, and did as he was recommended, and the Downy laid down his besom, and ran off rapidly towards Regent-street.

"Buy a flower from a poor girl, sir?" said the young female, rising from the steps of the church and approaching Mr. Grinderby. "I haven't taken a penny to-day, and my mother is sick and starving for want of bread."

"Ugh!" cried Grinderby, flourishing his umbrella; "keep off, or I'll give you in charge, you slut, you. D'ye think I want to catch a fever from your beastly flowers? Here, policeman! Take this female into custody for begging," he said, addressing one of the Force, who just came up.

"Now, then, move on, will yer? or I'll make yer!" was that worthy's address to the girl. "Ah! you want a night's lodging, do yer?"

And with that he made towards her, and seized her by the wrist, so that her flowers fell on the pavement, where they lay like withered hopes on the letterless gravestone of an unknown despair.

"Oh, good sir, kind sir, let me go, my mother's dying!" she screamed out.

At this moment a four-wheeled cab drove up with the Downy on the box. He opened the door, and Grinderby got in, shouting:

"To Paddington Station, as fast as you can drive."

"Ax yer parding, ain't yer goin' to give me nothink for fetchin' it?" cried the Downy.

"No!" bellowed Grinderby. "Here, policeman, look after this man and woman. Drive on you; will you?"—to the cabman—"d'ye hear?"

"I ain't deaf," said "cabby;" evidently trying to give an opportunity for the reward due to his summoner.

"Policeman," cried Grinderby, "do your duty. I ordered this fellow to drive on, and he is loitering here."

The policeman seized the reins of the horse with one of his red and horny hands by way of answer, and pushed him on his haunches, and then kicked him in the ribs.

"Do you hear the gentleman?" he said. "Drive off, or it will be the worse for yer. What! yer

won't go on, won't yer? I've got yer number, and I'll summon yer to-morrer, I will."

The unfortunate driver thought of his wife and children, and said :

"No, offence, sir, I hope. I couldn't start no sooner."

The "officer" was somewhat pacified : officers of the Force like to be called "sir." It is a tribute which they exact from the harried costermonger and street stall-keeper. Under their distinguished chiefs, they affect the military style, and as they are drilled with the sabre, and put through military evolutions in the barrack-yards of the Guards, there is some little reason for it; and perhaps this is why they affect the style and manner of an Austrian army of occupation in an Italian town in this particularly free and independent country of Britons.

As Grinderby drove off without giving him sixpence, our specimen of the Force felt inclined to be savage at the expense of some one; and so he turned round very fiercely on the girl and the Downy. For some reason or other—probably because he was lazy, and didn't see that anything could be made out of the pair—he contented himself with a warning and a few menacing gestures, and walked on.

"Hi, Bobby!" shouted the fearless Downy, when he had got some paces off; "leave us a slice or two of yer carrots, will yer?" alluding to the colour of the "officer's" hair, which would have done credit to a modern chignon; "I see yer sniffin' the cold meat along hall them aireys," and other expressions

of the kind, which caused the policeman to face round, and regard him in a threatening manner more than once, before he had proceeded fifty yards on his beat.

But the Downy in this instance showed more valour than prudence; for it chanced that a young fellow of dashing exterior passing rapidly by, and observing the forlorn appearance of the girl, tossed a shining sixpence in her lap, just at one of the very moments when an unusually successful sarcasm of the Downy caused the "Bobby" fully to face round, as if hesitating whether to return or not. In a moment he arrived at a decision. Rapidly retracing his steps, he approached the shrinking girl, and seizing her a second time by the arm, he dragged her up and shook her violently.

"Now, then," he said; "I told yer to move on, didn't I? Come along quiet, or I'll give yer something to make yer."

The girl screamed and cried:

"I must go home, I tell you. I won't come. My mother will die!"

"Oh, yer won't, won't yer?" was the rejoinder; "then we'll see."

"Here, take this," shrieked the girl, giving him the sixpence; "it's all I have, but let me go."

It was well for some one, perhaps for himself temporarily, but certainly for the Downy, in the contingent perspective of a broken head, hard swearing on the part of the "officer," and the other active and intelligent fraction of the Force within sound of his rattle, that the policeman did let the girl go at that

precise moment. A street besom is not a handy weapon for a sudden row. The twigs are not efficacious either to floor your antagonist or to grasp as a handle. But such as it was, it was brandished in the air, and had already executed a preliminary flourish in the strong thin arms of the washed-out young man, when the policemen pocketed the ransom and released his Briseis. He then confronted the Downy, hardly able to credit the possibility of a meditated attack. The latter did not fear the newspapers of the next morning ; nor had a "month" any particular terrors for him. Respectability must witness such outrages committed in a "free country," and content itself with writing to Scotland-yard or the Home Office ; a mode of proceeding which is a complete waste of time, paper, ink, and a postage-stamp or two, as the Yard pitches it into the waste-paper basket, and the Office refers it back to the Yard. But the Downy's passion was aroused, and he didn't care "wot cum of it." Probably the "officer" on his part did not much care to push matters to extremities, and was in haste to expend the ransom ; since the day was cold and dry and his complexion and occupation thirsty. So he eyed the other as a glutted hyena about to drink at a convenient stream might regard the intrusion in his path of a starved jackal, and merely indulging in a brace of scowls, turned on his heel with a hand adroitly slipped upon the head of his staff, in anticipation of the encounter which he was content to shun. Perhaps he was not very brave, that "officer." As a human hyena, women and children were his natural prey. We

have spoken of the Downy's imperturbable good humour. So thoroughly accustomed was he to such scenes and events, so utterly contrary to his experience was anything else, that after a few expressive grimaces, he quite acquiesced in the abject necessity of the situation. Like the conquered but unconquerable Prometheus, he had long been known,

τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔστ' ἀδῆριτον σθένος.

"Vell," was his reflection, half uttered to himself and half to the girl, "I wouldn't be in his beadle-crushers when he's wanted by his Chief Commissioner." And he pointed significantly downward in a direction which was not that of Scotland-yard nor that of the residence of any earthly authority, unless it might be at the antipodes, which certainly at that moment did not enter into his calculations. "I vish I'd got him someveres handy in a good carpet-beatin' ground werry secluded and priwate; I'd fetch the dust hout of his huniform for him. Come, don't be down-'arted, young 'ooman, I'm blessed if I don't earn a bob for yer, afore yer a quarter of an hour holder. I never was here afore vithout collaring vun, and I don't mean to begin to-day, I can tell you. As for that Bobby, let me ketch him in Hyde Park the first Reform Meetin', and if I don't mark him my name's not Downy."

The girl sat shivering and moaning. She hardly noticed what he said. She had not even picked up her scattered flowers. Grown in a crowded nursery ground for purposes of gain, in the mould brought from a desecrated churchyard, cut by rude

hands, and left to be trampled into dust or mire by the heedless passers, their brief existence seemed an epitome of her own. Did she think all this? Not a bit of it. She was thinking only of the hopeless poverty of her East-end dwelling, and the face of her sick mother turned towards the door in the faint agony of expectation, perhaps of death itself.

The quick eye of the Downy, in the mean time, scanned the few persons who approached and passed by, with the practised gaze of an expert. Now and then, he would burst into a sudden activity of sweeping, in proportion as his hopes of coin were more or less excited. Shy men, without coppers to spare, would avoid his crossing, others would make for him, as if they wished to run him down. Shabby and seedy persons would pause, and make an excuse, "I haven't a copper about me, my good fellow;" or, "I'll give you something next time," were their most frequent remarks. To these he always respectfully touched his cap, and honoured them by one or two slight flourishes of the "hinwestment." At length his patience was rewarded. In full dinner costume, with spotless white tie, and his last pair of soiled evening gloves on his broad fat hands, the gloves of the day being carefully stowed in the pocket of his paletot, came our old friend Mr. Stingray, with appetite sharpened by a glass of absinthe just quaffed at Véry's. He looked at his watch and he looked at the church clock.

"Hem!" he said to himself, "I shall be late; and I never keep my worst enemies waiting for dinner, when I am going to dine with them myself. It spoils

the cook's temper, and endangers both the fish and the sauce. Things are apt to be cold enough when one is punctual. Here, you sir" (to the Downy), "can you fetch me a cab?"

"That I can," replied the latter, too earnest to waste a word in his usual style of conversation.

"Be quick, then! Mind, if you don't return with it in five minutes, I shall not wait."

The Downy merely nodded, and ran up the street, where we have already seen him disappear on a similar errand. This time the girl was silent. Perhaps it was because she had no flowers to offer—perhaps she did not consider Mr. Stingray's face sympathetic. There is no disciple of Lavater equal to your beggar. We don't believe that Sir Robert Hardun is ever importuned in the street by a real professional cadger. We think it probable that the Marquis of Gravesend, a really benevolent man, though sometimes eccentric in his mode of showing it, may have imposed upon the hopes of many of his poorer fellow-citizens. Stingray observed the girl sitting with her head almost bent down upon her knees, and a desire to see if she was pretty in her rags impelled that great cynical philosopher to address her.

"What is the matter with you, my girl?" he inquired, in tones as little harsh and grating as he could, without very much trouble, make them.

The girl looked up with a bleary and blank expression of pain.

"Oh!" grunted the philanthropical satirist.

The fact is, he had seen enough; and felt rather

angry with the poor wretch for disappointing his vague expectation, that she might be pretty.

"You had better be off," he growled. "The police don't do their duty, or you wouldn't be allowed to sit there in that manner. It's disgraceful in a civilised community."

Alas! the police had done their duty, in the person at least of one of them, who was at that moment smacking his lips in a neighbouring public-house over the drops, as it were, of blood wrung from his victim's veins.

"My mother is sinking—dying for want of food, sir," uttered the girl at last; "will you bestow a trifle on me in Heaven's name? She is ill of a fever."

"The devil she is," interrupted the startled "satyr"-ist, retreating several paces. "How dare you bring contagion into the streets? If I could only see a policeman," he added; "but they're all down the areas, of course. Couldn't you invent something a little newer than that eternal sick mother of yours?" he asked brutally. "I dare say you have made a pretty harvest of it. Got a pocket full of pence? Wouldn't take broken victuals, eh? Come, I'll wager this half-crown you wouldn't."

And he balanced one he had taken a minute or so before from his trouser-pocket, as if to mock her with the coin.

"I assure you, sir," said the girl, "I haven't taken a penny besides the one that good young man gave me—him that's gone for the cab."

"I don't think he's coming back with the cab,"

muttered Stingray. "But, I say, how about this generous rogue in tatters? Has he been making love to you?" The girl looked up inquiringly. "Very shocking!" quoth Stingray: "cheap immorality of our London beggar population. Must make a note of that. Reminds me of one of Burns's poems—let me see. Will do for an after-dinner anecdote, with a little embellishment *à la* Balzac. '*Cupid en haillons!*' good title for an article in the 'Rye-mount.' Do better for the 'Babylon Diary'—call it the 'Romance of a Doorstep,' or the 'Crossing-sweeper's Bride.' Ha! ha! It's as well for you" (sternly to the girl) "that I don't see a policeman. Ah! here's the cab at last."

The Downy at this moment made his appearance, mounted on the box as before.

"So you've been an infernal time about it, sirrah!" he said to the Downy.

"Couldn't help it nohow," replied that worthy. "There was not a blessed run on the stand, shofel or four-vheeler, and consekently I had to hook it as far as the Circus. The fact is," added the Downy, in a confidential tone, "there's a werry mellancolly waterman on that stand as is handy here, and it's my hopinion that his 'ead's turned vith too much prosperity, and he's took the last cab hisself, on haccount of its slowness, and gone to dround hisself in the Serpentine, or to wisit his wife's relations."

"So, so! you're a humorist, my man," remarked Stingray, who had already taken out his note-book from force of habit; "but I'm already late, and so here, my fine fellow, take this to spend with your

young lady friend—here, no thanks! Drive fast, cabman. Notting-hill. I'll direct you."

"Vell," quoth the Downy, "hif hever I judge of a job agen by the hugliness of his mug, I'm jolly vell blessed, and I hopes he'll henjoy his wittles, that I do. Here, young 'ooman, here's luck. Didn't I say so? Come along, vill yer! till I melts the shiner? I'll stand a pot of sixpenny, and give yer a bob, s'elp me Californy."

And he tossed the half-crown so high that he missed catching it, and it fell flat on the pavement with a sound that seemed to excite the Downy to a fresh phase of emotion. As he picked it up, which he did instantly, he placed it between his teeth, to which it seemed to convey a galvanic shock. In a moment he started at top-speed, flinging the hinwestment (his besom) twenty yards before him the way he took, which was the same direction in which Stingray had vanished rapidly from sight, comfortably reclining in the four-wheeler with his legs on the back cushions.

"Hi! stop the cab! It's a bad un! It's a bad un!" shouted the poor fellow.

Full fifty yards the Downy ran, and then stopped short, like a schoolboy who has pretended to start for a race in order to "sell" a companion, whom he allows to get a-head and run on. Ruefully did he scratch his head, and mournfully did he retrace his steps to his sad companion's side.

"Look, here's a duffer!" he observed, showing her the half-crown bent nearly double with his teeth.

"The wicious, aggerawatin' old willain, to come this game over me, and I know he knowed it hall at the time. And I might a' knowed it, if I'd honly believed my heyes. With a face fit to frighten a child into fits, and to think I couldn't reckon him hup, and let him walk hover me, as hif I was vun of them born and heddicated hidiots as is meant to be done as round as hoops hall their blessed lives, and don't know a half-couter from a new brass farden."

And as if to relieve the violence of his feelings, the Downy took his besom and went through the ceremony of sweeping the crossing briskly for full half a minute. As for the girl, she fairly burst into a fit of tears, and cried as if her heart would break. She had already spent her fifteenpence, after her own wish—for she determined to compound with the Downy for a penn'orth of spruce for her own drinking, and then there was the penny he had already given her. She would not have deemed it grateful or lady-like to refuse to take anything with her benefactor. She had bought, in imagination, an ounce of "tea," a quarter of a pound of sugar, a loaf of bread, two ounces of butter, a halfpennyworth of milk, fourteen pounds of coal, and a penny candle, and expended the remaining twopence—would it be twopence or twopence halfpenny?—in half a quartern of gin. Or could she make it threepence, and so get three-penn'orth of brandy? And all this was shattered—and not to be! It was too much. A vision of a rapidly flowing stream lipping the arches of a dismal and dingy bridge actually took possession of the poor creature's fancy. Oh! if the rich could enter for a

brief while the inner world of the every-day life of the poor, could think with their jaded brains, feel with their aching hearts, crave with their entrails, see with their eyes, speculate with their thoughts, and add figure by figure their daily sum of miseries and wants—would or could prosperous humanity remain colder than stone or marble, more diabolical in inflicting torture than the Arch-ministers of evil themselves?—would not the mandate of the Great Teacher be done, and not mocked with lying lips and deceitful phrases?—would not the West meet the East with waggon-loads of abundance?—would not waste be uprooted from our hearths, and riot and profligacy rush dishevelled from our mansions, never to return?—would not the hosts of the united armies of Charity gird up their loins for the grand crusade of practical benevolence, and the Queen of all the land lead them on?

The Downy looked downcast and puzzled. He gazed at the girl, whose hopes he had fed and entertained so delusively; and the honest fellow felt “beat,” as he called it, and at a loss how he could venture further on a little encouraging chaff and the assurance that his luck would turn. The fact is, he didn’t quite believe in it himself.

“Blest if my sweet little cheerup that sits hup aloft,” he observed to himself, “ain’t dropt clean hoff his perch. As for myself, it’s no pertickler consikenx; I’m used to it. But ven I’ve made a gal, like this vun here, believe as I’m goin’ to see her through it, and things turns hout so howdacious bad, it gets over me haltogether—that’s wot it does.”

And for want of any resource he began to whistle ; ever and anon stealing a look at his disconsolate companion, and wishing for various sums, some very limited, and others sufficiently extensive, as people are apt to do under similar circumstances. He thought if he had a pound—if he had five pounds ; he never had five pounds in one lump in his life. And strange to say, so simple and generous are some of the despised poor, this chance acquaintance of his, this miserable being introduced to poverty by wretchedness, figured largely in all his schemes of extravagant expenditure, if he had but the “shiners” and the “flimsies.” He thought of something he had heard of the National Debt, of the gilt on the Lord Mayor’s coach, and what was its probable worth, of the plate he had seen through windows in Park-lane and elsewhere, where Dives sat at dinner with his guests late on summer evenings, before the blinds were drawn down ; he thought and thought and envied, like Sinbad’s guest, the porter of Bagdad ; but he might have thought, until all London, present and future, sank into the grave of buried empires, no travelled alderman of Cripplegate or Bishopsgate Within or Without would have asked him to enter and sit down at his board and entertained him with food and wine, and with tale and song. The chief charity and brotherhood of civilisation, like fairyland, lives only in the fiction which amuses the idle. We are all so good in our plays and our novels, our poems and songs—i.e., our sympathies and feelings are so catholic, so natural and grand. People sit in a play-house and see a representation of Charing Cross

covered with snow. There is a dying girl, or a fainting boy. Is it possible for well-dressed persons to pass by and not relieve such misery? Monsters in human shape! Of course the angelic somebody comes at length. Let those who have wept over the mimic scene leave the doors of the theatre and meet with its reality. Would ninety-nine out of a hundred pause, if they saw a fellow-creature lying stiff and stark on a doorstep? Not they. Where are the police? Is there not the workhouse? Do they not pay poor-rates and subscribe to charities? A man without money is no longer a man, save in song. The song is as popular as ever, but where is the man who is revered as a man for himself alone?

To return to the Downy. We verily believe that at that moment he was capable of robbing a bishop in order to relieve that girl, black-hearted scoundrel and garotter as he would have been, whom justice would have sentenced to be flogged with a new cat-o'-nine-tails, whilst his agonies would have been gloated over by men whose whole lives are one series of extortions and cruel robberies of poorer men, of widows and orphans, and beggared outcasts, as they sit in their prosperity, reading their newspapers at their breakfast-tables, groaning with the luxuries of life.

Six, seven, and nearly eight o'clock, and no luck had yet fallen to the Downy's share. The girl sat still waiting, ever and anon dropping into an uneasy doze, while the sweeper's besom was still plied with occasional bursts of vehemence, succeeded by longer and longer intervals of languor, if not motionless despair. At length a tall and good-looking gentleman

approached, and pausing half-way across the street, eyed the Downy with a scrutinising air. When, as the latter expressed it, he had completed his "portray for the R'yal Hacademy, size of life and twice as nattyrel," he appeared satisfied with the scrutiny.

"My good fellow," said he, "I like your appearance. You look honest, and I believe you are. I want you to undertake a little job for me, and you shall be handsomely rewarded. It is a very simple matter indeed. It is merely to deliver this note in Park-street, and to ascertain whether the lady to whom it is addressed is at home, whether she acts at the Thespis Theatre to-night; and, if you can, who has been there to-day. I will furnish you with the means to drink and treat any one whom you may get hold of to give you the information I require. The first part you may ask at the house when you deliver the note—I mean as to whether the lady is at home, and whether she plays this evening; the remainder, as to whether any guests are dining there, and who they are, I must leave to your ingenuity. You look sharp enough. You can meet me at eleven o'clock exactly opposite the Thespis. Here are five shillings. I will give you five more when I meet you."

Once more did the Downy fling the "hinwestment" on the ground, but this time with a very different feeling.

"And hif I'm axed by any one, ven I'm making t'other henquiries, who sent me, sir——"

"As you don't happen to know me," interrupted the gentleman, "you can't very well tell."

"Exactly," said the Downy. "I suppose I may

say it was a short, white-haired party, or a stout, helderly gent, or the bishop of hanyveres, or a furren prince? It von't matter, so as I don't discribe the party as did send me."

The gentleman nodded assent.

"You're just the fellow I wanted," he said. "It is a matter on which I can't employ any of my own people."

"Of course not," replied the Downy.

"Now then, be off!" said his employer. "But wash your hands and face first, like a good fellow, will you?"

"None of my clubs is in that direxion; but to oblige you, I'll make free with the pump-'andle. I jest vant to say a vord to this poor creetur afore startin'—her business is pressin'—shan't be a blessed minnit. You may depend on me, guv'nor, to be there in time."

And touching his cap to Arthur Aubrey; for it was he, looking, however, somewhat changed from what he was the last time we saw him, the Downy stooped down over the girl, and, whispering two or three words of rough and hasty encouragement, put half of the money he had just received into her hands and rapidly ran off.

The action was not lost on Aubrey. Approaching the girl, he soon gathered from her what had passed, and was greatly struck by the generous conduct of the Downy. As we shall not meet her again, we may as well mention that she was made happy for at least some time to come. Nor had the Downy much cause to complain of the liberality of his patron. On meet-

ing him again, and proving that he had well and faithfully executed his duties, he was presented with an amount utterly incommensurate with the service rendered. To use his own language, such treatment as he received made quite a "feller-creetur" of him.

"Arter all, if honesty ain't the best policy, it's werry satisfactory to the feelinx to be told yer honest, hespecial ven vun ain't squared by good fortin in a gineral pint of view. Sartainly I wosn't brought hup in a pertickler relligious fammily, and consekently escaped the sartainty of turnin' hout a hout-and-hout bad lot. As for this young nob, he's a right-sorted vun, and I honly hopes as he can afford it. But if he's spoony on *her*——" Here the Downy whistled long and low. "If there's anythink that licks me," he continued, "it's the chice sum of these swells makes of a fancy gal. They wants vun as hall the rest of the lot is arter. But there's no reconcilin' their fashins. Hall I can say is that it wouldn't be the style of courtin' as vould suit the book of the Honnerabel Downy Cove, Eskvire, if he was a nob. Not exactly the vay as he'd bestow his young affexions. But wot can yer hexpect from them poor creeturs, as is forced to inwent their wants, as never knows any henjyment as isn't hartificial, that goes to the mounseers for their cookin', and drinks winegar for wine; acos, I s'pose, they gets tired of findin' heverythink so precious sweet for 'em. There's times," added the Downy, with an air of profound philosophical reflection, "ven I vishes with the mokes that I hadn't been born at all. There's times, ven I've

vished as I'd been growed a dook or a hemperor. But ven I've done a good haction by a feller-creetur, and got the price of a day's wittles and a night's lodgin' in advance, not to speak of a few kevarterns of comfort besides, I don't know as I vould change with a good many as don't seem to be content with the best of everythink ven they've got it. It vould do a many of 'em a sight of good if they was forced about vunce a week to sweep a crossin', and to get hup about four o'clock in the mornin', say another day a week, to beat carpets—all Turkeys, and werry dusty, like some of them in the Temple, as is honly taken up vunce a year in the long wacation. My heyees! how they'd walk into their hartificial Frenchified grub the day arter, as that genelman's servant hout of place was telling us of t'other night at the Goat and Bootjack. And now I'll jest go and 'ave a tidy blow-out, or my name ain't Downy Cove, Eskvire, of the Lodge, Bedfordbury; that is, ven the funs is heasy, and a joey ain't no hobject."

And so saying, he betook himself to Clare Market for a pound of pork-chops, and thence to a public-house to cook them, and wound up the evening by taking the chair at a free-and-easy in a cabman's night-house, into which, after giving a few specimens of his convivial talents, he found himself suddenly voted by universal acclamation.

There he inaugurated the proceedings by proposing a fine of one halfpenny to the general drinking fund for every profane oath, which was looked upon as vastly comical, and carried with great applause. The

result at first was highly in favour of morality. But in spite of the guard which every one endeavoured to set on his tongue, the accumulation of liquor was so great, that the chairman was called upon by an arbitrary exercise of his power to rescind the rule of the evening. This being done, it was moved by a distinguished Hansom cabman, who wore moustaches, and had formerly been an undergraduate of Oxford, and seconded by a veteran 'bus-driver, a man of capes, asthma, rheumatism, and experience, that a fine should be imposed upon any member or stranger present who should *not* include an oath in every sentence he uttered.

We are sorry to record that this new dispensation barely realised fourpence halfpenny during the whole remainder of the symposium. And a dispute about fine number ten resulted in such sparring and bickering, both verbal and physical, coupled with language of such an awful description, that even the Downy, accustomed as he was to a great deal, got disgusted and vacated the throne.

"A joke's a joke," he observed to a friend after retiring, "but this beats the literariest lot as even I ever heerd on. There's a gent as I've only heerd speak of, for I never see him, which writes religious harticles in the newspapers, and they do say is the hout-and-houtest foul-mouthed vun in London. But as for most of these cabbies, I should think the werry hanimals they drive would be ashamed of their langvidge. Vell, harter all, who can vunder? They never gets a kind vord from no vun; nor ain't be-

lieved in, nor hencouraged, ven they does hact proper. It's hard lines to be on the box in all vethers, and to be treated aforehand as hif you wos livin' by cheatin', instead of drivin' hall sorts heveryveres."

"I'll tell you what it is, young feller," said his companion, a very quiet and respectable man in his way, with a large lamily, and a patch in his great-coat for every one of his thirteen children, which made his upper Benjamin, like Joseph's, a coat of many colours, though probably rather dingier in hue and coarser in texture than that of the Israelitish worthy—"I'll tell you what it is, there's no knowing how drivers is put upon by the public. Why, there's a pal of mine as is summoned reg'lar from the stand to take up at the Reform Club. There's three members of Parliament, and one of 'em weighs nigh upon eighteen stone, if he weighs a farden, as clubs together to be driven to the House reg'lar for a shilling. Ain't it enough to make any man swear when he sees that stout member coming down them steps, after keeping him within half a minute of the quarter of an hour a-talking to the other two? And he calls himself a friend of the people, and says it's all owing to him that bread is cheaper. But if ever I see tyranny writ plain on a man's face, it's writ on hisn. And if some of them have made bread cheaper, haven't they took it out of us in fares, as if men and 'osses could be found to do it? Swearing, indeed! I should like to know who wouldn't swear, if he was forced to drive them three members close on a mile for sixpence, and the extra sitter. I know where I'd

drive 'em fast enough, if I had the job, as soon as look at 'em. And what's more, I wouldn't charge anything for doing of it."

As the cabman with a large family did not name the locality to which he was willing to drive the stout member of Parliament and his two friends on such advantageous terms, we must leave it to the conjectures of our readers.

CHAPTER II.

THE LITERARY DINER-OUT.

There is no better passport to Society than ill-nature cleverly expressing itself.

THE act of Mr. Stingray, recorded in the previous chapter, may appear too fantastic in its wickedness. But are there not individuals, whose very joviality at a time when "all man's best feelings" are said to "possess him," induces them to fling red-hot half-pence to mud-larks and beggars, or to distribute loathsome capsules resembling bonbons to ragged little children in the street from the window or balcony of a sumptuous dining-room at Greenwich or Blackwall?

After all, there was nothing so uncommon in Mr. Stingray's conduct. Doubtless, to pass counterfeit coin knowingly is criminal enough; yet how many say, "Well, it was given to me." And these invariably select a poor person as most likely to take it, utterly oblivious or careless of the fact that it may ruin an innocent fellow-creature in a humble sphere of life. "It will do for a 'cabby,'" we have heard a man worth his thousands a-year say of a bad shilling

which he had received. "You had better throw that half-crown away," we have ourselves observed to one who had just discovered a counterfeit coin in his change. "Not I, it will do for a cabman; he'll manage to pass it, I'll warrant," was the answer.

The great satirist chuckled, as he extracted from a different pocket, before drawing on his clean white gloves, the well-calculated fare for the cabman, who had all the way been nursing great expectations from a party who gave half a crown for fetching his cab. Let us leave him to connect himself by inference with some story of the most sentimental benevolence in his conversation with the lady whom he sat next at dinner, no other than the wealthy Miss Debrett Stumpey,* of whom mention has been made. Their chief talk was about the spiritual destitution of Spitalfields. The worthy Archbishop of Middlesex, whose Notes on the Epicene Creed had, when a younger man, made such a sensation in the religious world, was then collecting a large amount of money for the purpose of building churches in the poorest district of his diocese. Strange that it never occurred to the worthy archbishop that the hearers of Christ were physically fed by Him who preached the doctrines of charity and love.

The miracles of the present day are moral and not

* A reviewer has kindly observed: "What shall we say of sneers directed at the benevolent and charitable lady whom he describes under a flimsy disguise—as Miss Debrett Stumpey?" The lady whom the reviewer probably means is only known to the author by fame for deeds of munificent charity and goodness. He could not caricature her, if he would, simply because he lacks the knowledge and materials, and certainly would not, if he could. Which, then, is to blame—author or reviewer?

physical. It seems miraculous that enlightened benevolence should remain so completely blind to the real requirements of the poor.

"What beautiful flowers!" remarked Stingray to one of his fair neighbours; "yet, does it not seem almost a barbarity to cull these floral darlings of nature for a single evening's entertainment?"

"Oh, I dote on flowers!" was the young lady's response. "Were you at the flower-show yesterday? No! Dear me! We were. The Prince and Princess were there. To-day is the first of the half-guinea days."

"I shall wait until it comes down to a shilling," said Stingray. "An author can't afford more."

"Oh, you amusing creature!" lisped the young lady, who was not in her first, nor yet in her second season.

"I don't think we ought to be allowed to use real flowers on the dinner-table," said Stingray. "We should encourage the artificial trade, and Rimmel could scent them, you know."

"How very funny!" said the young lady. "Mamma," to a lady across the table, "do you know what Mr. Stingray says? He says that people ought only to have artificial flowers on the dinner-table, because of the artificial flower-makers."

"I thought it was a most unhealthy employment," observed a middle-aged gentleman of a vaguely inquiring turn of mind, who was in the habit of saying "indeed!" after every answer to a question that he elicited.

"It depends upon the manufacture," replied Sting-

ray. "Now, the green used in ladies' dresses is very deadly both to the maker and wearer."

"Oh, you odious thing, you want to frighten one," said the young lady; "but I don't believe there can be any harm in this beautiful colour."

"Ah," quoth Stingray, who had now got the conversation round to the proper point, and obtained his cue, "I remember once meeting a poor creature engaged in this sort of work. She was dying fast of consumption, the result of her efforts to sustain a dying mother. In the course of my inquiries, I visited the manufactory and saw the process." (The old rascal had read it all up in that week's "*Lancet*.") "It was like a factory, where the labour was carried on by ghosts."

And he then launched into an eloquent description of all that he had read that morning, considerably embroidered for the occasion.

"And the young girl whom you relieved?" asked the inquiring gentleman, "what became of her?"

"I did not say that *I* relieved her; I am not rich enough to indulge in such delightful caprices."

"Oh, Mr. Stingray, how can you say so?" observed the young lady next him. "We know better. But tell us about the poor girl."

"I—that is, I mean, some friends of mine—got her into Brompton Hospital; but it was too late," said Stingray.

"How charming of you!" was the ladies' chorus.

"Pooh, pooh!" rejoined Stingray, "you don't think I did such a thing; you don't know what a hard-hearted, unfeeling old fellow I am!"

And they certainly did not, although more than one guest at the table had formed a by no means flattering estimate of his character. But the idle, empty, gossiping, and contemptible part of the world, as well as a great many who took what others said for granted, deemed Mr. Stingray to be a man of the finest feeling and most gushing benevolence.

"That dear Sting," they said, "what a noble creature, eccentric and severe in his satire; but such a heart!"

Thus the world deceives and is deceived, ever mistaking self-assertion for merit, and unscrupulousness for power.

"Are you going to Chalkstoneville's on Tuesday?" asked Mr. Stingray of Miss Debrett Stumpey.

"Oh, the dear old duke—yes, I would not miss it for anything; besides, one meets everybody who is anybody there."

"Then I shall meet you," said Stingray.

"How can you find time to write all your dear delightful books," said the lady, "and go out as you do?"

"It is part of my vocation," replied the great writer. "I pick up materials, you know. If, for instance, I want a model of magnificent Charity, am I not fortunate if I can gaze on the very lineaments of her expressive face, and hear with my own ears those silvery accents, which have carried comfort, and especially spiritual requirements, to the homes of so many?"

The lady blushed even a deeper yellow than her wonted hue, and smiled a wealthy smile on the au-

dacious flatterer, who paused to give his sally due effect.

"They do say," she rejoined, "that you are so naughty as to caricature all your friends in your wicked, delightful, charming novels."

"At any rate, I do not caricature those whom I honour and revere, dear Miss Debrett Stumpey," said Stingray, in the most insinuating accents he could muster, which greatly resembled, we should imagine, the tones of the frog who "would a-wooing go." "And I have met one, ere now," he continued, "whose virtues it would be as impossible to portray, even in earnest, as to do them sufficient justice in one's heart."

And the monster actually pressed his serviette, as if involuntarily, over the exact spot where his watch was tick, ticking, and recording on its honest dial the moments which were insensibly bringing him nearer and nearer to the verge of his hypocritical career.

"But I own," he said, "I am tempted, *entre nous* now and then to pin a few real beetles, wasps, and butterflies for my museum."

"I declare, you dreadful creature, I feel quite afraid of you," said the young lady on the other side, who overheard this last sentence uttered in rather a louder tone than Mr. Stingray's immediately previous remarks. "Are you not sometimes afraid lest the wasps should sting you in turn?"

Mr. Stingray slightly frowned. The fact is he had a few days before received some very severe personal affronts from a clever young journalist and author,

in retaliation for an outrage of the most heinous kind. He had by no means the hide of a rhinoceros, so far as his own feelings were concerned; and like some political bullies of the present day, could not endure even the slightest criticism on his own character, conduct, or motives.

"My sweet young friend," he whispered to the young lady, "if I could catch you in my net, I would not injure the delicate texture of your beautiful wings for a thousand a-year. I spoke of butterflies, and not Peris, you know."

As he often dined with that young lady's father, we will not question his truth.

"But only fancy, my dear Miss Stumpey, what temptation one is sometimes subjected to! This morning I had a visit from Mr. Snobbington. I dare say you have seen him; drives a gorgeous curricule in the Park. What do you think he came for?"

"Really," answered Miss Stumpey, "I cannot imagine. A subscription, I suppose?"

"*Pas si bête!* Only an invitation to Chalkstoneville's next grand ball."

"What impertinence!" cried the lady. "And what did you say?"

"The fellow will expect me to bring him to a reception at Debrett House next," said Stingray, with admirable flattery.

"Do tell me what you answered. I am dying to know," rejoined Miss Stumpey.

"I told him that I would on one condition. But you'll be shocked, if I tell you what it was."

"Nonsense," rejoined Miss Stumpey; "do, do tell me, there's a good creature."

"I counselled him to commit a dreadful crime as the price of acceding to his request," said Stingray, gravely.

"A crime! What can you mean, you dear, delightful thing?" cried Miss Stumpey.

"Yes, a crime," returned Stingray; "one so dreadful that the ancient Romans excluded it from the programme of possibility in their code of punishments."

"I declare you quite frighten me," said the lady. "I don't know that I shall allow you to go on."

"You must know that the fellow has a father, as most of us have, or have had," pursued Stingray.

Miss Stumpey bowed her acquiescence.

"Well!" she said.

"No! It is not well; that's just the point," said Stingray. "It's ill enough with him. Fancy having a living progenitor who is a large general dealer in Houndsditch, supplies half the paper mills in England with rags!"

"You don't say so! How dreadful!" was the rejoinder.

"It's a sad thing for poor Snob," continued Stingray, who inwardly wished that he had such a father to supply him with luxuries. "But he couldn't help it; you know. Only, why should he want to know us?"

"Ah! why indeed!" quoth Miss Stumpey. "But people never do know what is good for them."

"Well," said Stingray, "I said to him, 'This is the ambition of your life, is it not; to have the *entrée* of Chalkstoneville House?' 'I'd do anything to obtain it,' he replied. 'Then,' said I, 'nothing is easier. Murder your father! If undiscovered, so much the better. That will amazingly simplify the affair. Should, however, the parricide be discovered, consider the *éclat* you will gain. You can furnish bail in any amount out of the old boy's coffers, on condition that when you surrender, your friends who are bail for you can keep the amounts you have furnished them for the occasion——"

"But, excuse me," interrupted Miss Stumpey, "I thought murder was not aailable offence."

"No more it is," replied Stingray, "but what of that? Well, I proceeded to tell Snobbington that if he did this, he would be quite a lion, and that no party at Chalkstoneville House should be considered complete without him, before trial, and that after trial and execution, he should be as near as possible to George the Fourth's effigy and coronation robes at Madame Tussaud's."

"Good gracious!" cried Miss Stumpey; "and did you really say all this?"

"Did I not?" was the answer. "And, what is more, I really thought at first he was almost tempted by the grandeur of the reward to undertake a more than Roman action. If he had, what genius could have celebrated the deed? Macaulay would be quite unequal to the task. I am not so sure about Bon Gaultier."

"How absurd! you ridiculous man!" said Miss

Stumpey, hardly knowing whether to take it in earnest or not. "You don't mean to say that the man really thought of murdering his father?"

"Don't I?" replied Stingray. "Depend upon it, he would have annihilated the old rag-picker to get an invitation to our dear duke's parties, could he have done so safely. And he would disown his mother, too, to get invited by you."

"You may depend upon it, I shall never tempt him. It's astonishing what these low people will do, is it not, Mr. Stingray?"

That gentleman answered that it undoubtedly was; and he cited some rare instances of toadyism; but forbore to mention his own performances in this line, we may be sure.

They then talked about Patti, and Turner's pictures, and croquet, and the last Horticultural Fête. Miss Stumpey imparted the information that there was but one frame-maker in England who could make a frame for a Turner. As we do not intend to advertise a single tradesman in these volumes, we shall not give the name of the inspired artist in frames, who had so successfully imposed upon Miss Stumpey's credulity, or been so fortunate as to inspire a whim in that wealthy virgin's head. Why should not Miss Stumpey talk nonsense about the pictures which she purchased? It is a wonderful thing to hear wealth prattle about high art; but possibly not so [instructive to record it, as it would be difficult. Perhaps, after all, your great Manchester manufacturer is the least objectionable patron of art. He buys his pictures from accredited middlemen, like the

illustrious Flake of Wardour-street, who tells you, "S'elp, me—that 'ere is the best bit of stuff Danby ever painted," or the great Pasticcio, who was a courier, and farms rising artists. He only states the price that he gave, and then shows you the certificate of the picture's authenticity. To him a Stanfield is a Stanfield, and nothing more. He does not affect to criticise. His admiring friends are spared at least that ordeal.

Mr. Stingray was dining with the editor of a powerful literary journal—one of the most insufferable coxcombs and humbugs of his country and period—who wore a cloak with a pose, as if he were a bad style of statue descended from a supposititious pedestal; and who walked down the Strand as if his aim were to strike the top of his unpleasant cranium against an imaginary ceiling at every step. This man, by some inconceivable freak of fortune, had got his round, undistinguished person thrust into a distinguished square hole, as one of the intellectual sign-posts of the age. He probably did more to check genius and choke merit, while fostering pretence and mediocrity, than any other loud-voiced vulgar charlatan of his day. His vanity and malignity were well known and widely appreciated, but still he sat in judgment, and could make or mar a reputation. The ponderous dulness of his organ crushed with elephantine weight the struggling wretch against whom the tyrant directed its malignant fury. Like the elephant, he never forgot the smallest provocation or offence. But unhappily it was not always necessary to offend him, to draw on you the full weight of

his malice. If you were poor or unknown, or had not been recommended to him; if you were truthful or earnest—nay, if you were original—it was enough to excite his wrath and provoke his instinctive condemnation. On the other hand, the shallowest “priggism” was sure to find in him a patron and a friend. The verdict of the “Centipede” was a Hall Mark. Never mind if it passed fraud current, branded an honest man with ignominy, or destroyed a Keats. If some unfortunate victim appealed to a law court against a more monstrous act of injustice than usual, his own counsel would throw up his brief with a hypocritical appeal to respectability, and the judge would compliment him. A British jury believes in a paper with twenty-four pages of advertisements. No amount of fact as to the particular assassination in question could disturb their minds. They would as soon convict of kleptomania a bishop with twenty thousand pounds a-year, and as many aristocratical witnesses to character as would furnish an Anti-Reform Demonstration reaching from the Carlton to Apsley House. If the journal said a man’s French or Latin was bad, it was bad. No matter whether he were a teacher of languages or not, *doctus utriusque linguæ*. No matter what errors its own writers made in their “æsthetic” twaddlings or “esoteric” strainings after fine writing. A Corsican vendetta was nothing to the resentments of this cynical and finical print, which would stab and poison to the fifteenth cousinship of a chronic feud. Sometimes a base instinct and a coarse judgment would alone suffice to dictate a “slashing cut up.” There were two or three men

of intellect connected with it ; but they were well paid, and sealed the bond, which delivered them up body and soul to the guidance of the man in the cloak, mask, and poniard. The "Satirist" in its worst days never inflicted a tithe of the real mischief done by this arbiter of literary taste. For whose existence did it embitter—whose hopes did it shatter—whose steps did its bravoës and bloodhounds track to the grave? The struggling, friendless author, the earnest writer and poet, the man who either could not or would not scribble in its grooves, or bow down before the idol which it had set up. If the literary Gregory did not levy black-mail, his prosperity demanded its victims, and pursued them as unscrupulously. To blast an author's reputation basely and unfairly is surely as prejudicial to Society as to threaten to calumniate the domestic relations of a duke. Nor was any expedient too small and too vile to accomplish the purpose in hand. Misquotation was a common mode of attack. Who cared for the author's indignant denial if, which was not always the case, he could get it inserted in another journal? He was only set down as some poor disappointed wretch smarting under an adverse criticism. "Criticism!" One smiles bitterly at the name. It meant in those columns an atrocious conspiracy or a panegyrical job.

Mr. Stingray stood well with this individual. They were flamens of the same unholy temple, priests of the same Juggernaut. They both studied the religion of prosperity, the piety of success.

"Capital affair!" observed Mr. Hugag Thugly, the gentleman in question, to Mr. Stingray across

the table, "that of the Honourable Captain Helshot in the Pacific!"

"Didn't notice it particularly," was the reply. "What was it? Shelled a nest of pirates, or something of that kind?"

"Yes. There is a capital sketch of it in the 'Illustrious,' done by young Fussell of the *Devastator*, on the spot."

"Indeed! What was it about?" inquired the mild and vaguely informed gentleman whom we mentioned just now.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Hugag, "we had a squadron there, the same which had been so long cruising during the war in search of the Russians, who kept so wonderfully out of their way, when a British missionary came on board the *Devastator*, and represented that he had received some insult from a petty chief in one of the Friendly Isles. I think the natives objected to his efforts to Christianise the chief's youngest daughter, or something of that kind. Of course the thing was not to be tolerated. So Helshot went in and shelled half a dozen villages, and the missionary stood on the paddle-box and assisted in guiding the vessel up the creeks. The natives threw javelins from their canoes, but they all fell short, and then the missionary went below, and the steamer ran them down like fun."

"Ὡστε θύνηνους," put in Stingray, who had received a college education.

"Just so," replied Mr. Hugag, who thought it was a nautical phrase in which Stingray had indulged, relating to the tonnage of the vessel em-

ployed. "They killed fifteen hundred men, women, and children of these piratical cannibals; but the missionary nobly saved the life of one little girl, whom a midshipman pulled out of the water, and christened her on the spot after Her Most Gracious Majesty. He has brought little Victoria to England, and placed her at an orphan school—charming trait, was it not?"

"That man ought to be made a bishop," observed Miss Stumpey.

"You have only to say so," said Stingray, "and the thing is done."

"But is there any evidence that these people are pirates and cannibals?" asked the mild gentleman.

"I should think there was," said Mr. Hugag. "They roast hogs entire in holes dug in the ground, and bake them with red-hot stones. You may depend upon it that wretches who do this would not be very particular if they had the opportunity."

"Indeed," said the mild gentleman, "I don't quite see——"

"You may depend upon it our people knew what they were about. It is this sort of doubt and sickly sentimentality which leads to so much mischief."

"But how came Captain Helshot, who, I see, is made an admiral and has got the Cross of the Bath, to let the Russians slip from between his fingers as he did?" inquired another of the party.

"Perhaps," said a young gentleman who had shown some symptoms of impatience during the conversation, "the Russian javelins don't fall short——"

The look which the two despots of the dinner-

table levelled at that daring youth did not fall short. Nothing abashed, however, he returned to the charge.

"It appears," he said, "that the missionary had resided there three years, and been well and even kindly treated. I don't quite understand——"

"I don't think you do, sir," interrupted Mr. Hugag. It is quite a mistake to suppose that rudeness is not an element in modern polite conversation. "I rather imagine," he continued, in a voice which utterly precluded any other from making itself heard, "that the Spanish difficulty is nearing a happy solution."

"Indeed!" said the vague gentleman. "I should have thought that something would have been done, considering what England has submitted to."

"Yes," said the indignant youth, who had not the fear of the "Centipede" and literary assassination before his eyes, "I don't know what we shall submit to next. Our ships fired into, our people imprisoned, our Church forbidden and anathematised, and the graves of Protestants desecrated, and dead bodies actually flung into the river——"

"After what we did for them," said the vague gentleman; "first in driving the French out, and then expelling Don Carlos——"

"A most unlawful act," interposed the irreverent young man.

"And putting their present queen on the throne," said the vague gentleman.

"You may depend upon it," observed Hugag, "that Lord Yieldingham knows what he is about. He said in the House the other night that it was not in accord-

ance either with the feelings or wishes of the British Government, or those of our illustrious ally, to interfere with the internal regulations of Spain, especially those relating to so delicate a matter as religion; and in relation to the alleged attacks upon British ships, he had ascertained that the vessels were within three miles of the Spanish coast, and that it had been represented to him that the Spanish Admiral, Rascaillos, under whose orders the ships had been fired upon, was extremely short-sighted. As to the crews, they had the ordinary Spanish legal mode at their disposal for obtaining liberty and redress."

The vague gentleman shook his head.

"I don't quite see," he said, "why France should dictate terms to us."

"I consider it a most fortunate thing," was the remark of Mr. Hugag. "The Emperor is one of the most enlightened men of the age. He is devoted to England, sir. I was one of the late deputation which had the honour of waiting upon him. Nothing could be more flattering than our—I may say, my reception. The Emperor inquired after Mrs. Hugag, and of the services which, he was pleased to say, I had rendered to France and to civilisation by assisting the French representative, M. Vaurien, during the Great Exhibition of 1851. That man, sir, is the glory of the age."

"Well," said the vague gentleman, "I don't quite see it—that is, I should like England to be better prepared—I mean her navy and all that."

"Pooh-pooh!" said Stingray; "our defence is our increased market for French goods. What did Mr.

Sowerface say to his constituents the other day? 'Let every English labourer and mechanic consume his pint of *vin ordinaire* a day, a consummation which I devoutly hope to see realised, and war will become impossible.' And so it will."

"We have happily put down duelling," said Mr. Hugag, "and shall ultimately make war, which is merely duelling on a larger scale, impracticable. As that great man, Mr. Chimpanzee, said the other day in reply to a letter addressed to him by his brother Moses, of Ogretton, another great European war is simply an impossibility—as impossible as a war on the North American Continent, where there is a standing army of only nine thousand men."

"Ha! ha!" shouted Stingray; "not much danger there, I should think."

"But I don't see that France is disarming," interposed the reckless young man.

"That will come, sir," said Mr. Hugag, authoritatively. "The Emperor has privately intimated as much to Mr. Chimpanzee, with whom he has been frequently closeted of late. All that France wants is coal and iron—steam-coal to develop her mercantile marine, and steel for fancy articles and scissors."

"Scissors!" exclaimed the vague gentleman. "Indeed! How very odd! To think that the *entente cordiale* should depend upon scissors and sour wine! I should have thought—— But I wish that Mr. Chimpanzee would take the opportunity to say something about Cayenne."

"A mere penal settlement for the brigands who would disturb the public peace," said Mr. Hugag,

authoritatively. "Portland Island with alligators, nothing more."

"Why should not every country have a similar penal settlement?" asked Stingray. "I wish we were as sensible. It would be a wholesome check upon our predatory classes. Our system is far too expensive."

"Good Heavens!" cried the younger disputant; "would you defend that horrible tyranny?"

"I defend the cause of order, sir," said Mr. Hugag; "and if Cayenne assists to maintain order, I don't see what it has to do with us. We are bound, if anything, to sympathise with our illustrious ally."

"No such crocodile sympathies for me," said the incorrigible young man. "And I can't see why we should interfere to massacre a set of poor, weak, ignorant natives in the Pacific, and endure these outrages at the hands of stronger states. Why should we not have shelled Cadiz or Malaga on the same principle? I think that the British Government is far more short-sighted than the Spanish admiral. And I believe we shall all be obliged, before very long, to arm in defence of our own liberties, property, and lives."

"Absurd!" said Mr. Stingray.

"Ridiculous!" added Mr. Hugag. "Depend upon it, England will never arm again."

"Then she will lose her colonies, and sink to the condition of a fifth-rate power."

"She is better without her colonies," said Mr. Hugag.

"She will become the industrial workshop of the universe," said Mr. Stingray.

“She will become an island of emasculated chimpanzees,” said the young gentleman.

“Indeed, I really must say,” said the vague gentleman, “that these doctrines are new to me, and, if I might hazard a remark, it would be to the effect that if the agricultural interest is destroyed, and the manufacturing interest is dependent on the will of our armed friends, I apprehend that the latter might decline under the effects of a hostile competition, and we should no longer be able to continue to purchase food supplies, and then——”

“Coffee, gentlemen,” said the butler, saving England by his opportune entrance from her fate.

“Rank protection!” growled Mr. Hugag.

“Obsolete twaddle!” sneered Mr. Stingray.

“I must put a black mark against this young springald’s name,” muttered Mr. Hugag, fumbling for his note-book. “He will be publishing a pamphlet one of these days, or a volume of poetry entitled ‘The Sword and the Lyre,’ or some such rubbish, and then——”

The critical assassin grimly smiled; he was already misquoting his late antagonist by anticipation, like an expectant cannibal gloating over a promised repast.

CHAPTER III.

SWELL AND SNOB.

And so doth seek
 Gilding by vain attrition with the great,
 And thus he, with small perseverance, gains
 Their vices, not their virtues :

* * * * *

He is a type
 Of those whom I abhor—intruders vile,
 That like a troop of chattering apes, let loose
 Within the precincts of Jove's temple, grin
 On Fortune's worthier giftless votaries :
 Giving false names to things, false pride to names.
 Risen from nought, enriched by basest means,
 He hath more shame to call his father, "sire"
 (Though he were honest, which the son is not),
 Than without trembling to blaspheme high Jove,
 And scoff at Heaven's great thunders.

"It was a doosid select thing, I can tell you, Snob," said Cornet Swellingham to Mr. Sidney Snobbington "of that ilk," which meant a villa at Clapham Rise and part of a small house in Piccadilly, as the pair were breakfasting together one morning in the latter locality. "And doosid slow, too," he drawled, after a yawn. "Thought you were to be there?"

"No," said the other, "went to the Opera instead. A fellah can't be everywhere, you know."

"Come now, no lies with me, Snob, old fellah. You know you would have given your eyes to be invited. I thought Sting was to have done the needful for you?"

"Not he," replied the other. "Not but what he's prwomised often enough. I will say, that when you say a thing, you do it; the difficulty is to get you to prwomise."

"You should not ask too much, Snob," said Mr. Swellingham. "I'm always open to anything in rweason. Have you seen Aubrway himself lately?"

"Saw him in the Park yesterday, driving splendid crweechure," was the answer.

"Gwacious! What, one horse! Not a gig?"

"No!" said Mr. Snobbington. "I mean a woman."

"Not his wife?" asked Swellingham.

"Should say not," replied the other, "unless the fellah has two."

"By-the-bye," said Mr. Swellingham, "that puts me in mind. I heard Stingway say, last Thursday, in the Park, when Lord Fitznoodle drove by in his curwicle with Mrs. Bouncer as his side, that it was rank bigamy, and two fellahs from Oxford seemed awfully amused. Can't see it, can you?"

"Can't say I do," answered Mr. Snobbington. "Fitznoodle is a widower, and he hasn't marwied Mrs. Bouncer."

"These clayver fellahs," continued Swellingham, with an air of reflection, "are like the judges in the

law courts. They say the stoopest things, and the barwisters immediately laugh, and then all the attorneys, until the whole Court joins, including the very usher, except the parties to the suit, you know; and when they've all exhausted themselves, the judge cries 'Order!' himself, like a blessed old hypocritical Punch. But, I say, isn't this fellah Aubrway going the pace a few?"

"Well, I must say," said Snobbington, "I think it is very bad taste not to keep things a little darker. He needn't pay such open and undisguised attention to other women, and drive them in the Park. I'm no moralist, but there are two ways of doing everything. I really feel very much for his wife."

"Why, what next?" said his friend. "Are you coming out in the sentimental line? What would Stingway say?"

"He may say what he likes," returned Mr. Snobbington, "but she is a splendid crweechure, and I should like——"

"To console her, doubtless," interrupted the other. "Well, why don't you try? But I hear that her sight is going. You had better make haste, or your manly attractions will be lost upon her."

"Now, don't chaff a fellah," rejoined Mr. Snobbington, "but intrwduce me, as you prwomised."

"Who?—I? Do you mean to say that I promised you?"

"Well, you did nearly," was the answer.

"Hem!" said Swellingham. "You see the thing is not easy. Their house is so small, and they know so many good people, they can afford to be so very

exclusive. But I'll try one of these days. In the mean time, Snob, you must let me have that money I spoke about, I tell you. The fact is, I can't do without it."

Let us pause to describe these worthies. In the first place, they were about the same age, some thirty years. Swellingham was tall, dark, and decidedly aristocratic. Snobbington was fair, florid, and by no means unprepossessing. Although their circumstances were very unlike, their habits were similar, for this reason, that Snobbington endeavoured to imitate Swellingham in everything that he did. They lived together in chambers in the same house in Piccadilly, and as their alliance was mutually convenient and desirable to both, we need express no wonder at its oddity. It was shrewdly suspected that Snob, as he was called for the sake of brevity, paid "Swell Fits'," which was Swellingham's nickname, share of the rent as well as his own, and that he lent him money, and was generally conducive to his comfort and luxury in this world. For Fits was the fifth son of a selfish old baronet of the clubs and coulisses, and had very little besides his pay as cornet in the Third Blues upon which to live on the very best of everything the world could afford; and Snob was the only son of a wealthy tradesman, whose calling he, Snob, fondly trusted that nobody knew. Like Sir Piercie Shafton, Snob was a plucky fellow, and accomplished in the science of small arms; and therefore no one ventured plainly to allude to his origin in his presence, although indirectly and obscurely he was greatly chaffed and ridiculed, on account of his

absurd proclivities and mania for being considered an appurtenance of the haut ton of London. There was, however, one man who roasted him openly without the slightest reticence or remorse, and this man poor Snob revered and feared to a childish extent. This arbiter of his fate and happiness was Mr. Stingray, who, for his own reasons, however, allowed him to exist, but in a state of constant torture. It suited Stingray to keep him alive; but constantly impaled, as an ardent entomologist would a gilded beetle, or a butterfly, a *Coleopterus metropolitanus magnificus*, or a Camberwell beauty, as the case might be. After all, Snob was not half so bad as Stingray himself in doing "kotoo" to those above him in social rank, but the manner was different. Poor Snob's propensities were so undisguised and open, a child might have read him, whereas Stingray affected to hate and despise the gods, before whom in secret he bowed down, and whose worship was the chief object of his life. As for Fits, he allowed Snob to imitate him in everything, save dress; and in his objection to this he was absolute. "No, Snob, my boy," he would say, "I don't mind riding your horses, or going anywhere with you; and as for Pond, my sufferer, he may make your clothes, and you can pay him for both, but you shan't wear the same things as myself at the same time." For the rest, Fits never quizzed his friend openly in public, nor, to his credit be it said, did he allow him to be ridiculed behind his back. With all the folly, and laxity, and absurdity, and, must we say so, dissipation and profligacy in which the pair indulged,

they had both redeeming traits of character. They were neither cowards nor cold-blooded seducers, neither blacklegs nor hypocrites. They were men of fashion of the period, spoilt by the period, aping all the fantastic and frivolous manners of their age; and even sometimes superficially, from mere want of head, or head training, imitating superficially and exoterically the heartless and libertine expression of a vicious habit of thought and conduct. Let us add, that Fits actually talked like the men of his class in "Punch," and that Snob did his best to excel his patron; and that the latter had a permanent *liaison* with a very pretty, and otherwise well-conducted, but uneducated young woman, who had been a housemaid in his father's establishment, and by whom he had already four or five children. This was an affair that Snob kept quite in the dark. Not, we blush to record it, that he was ashamed of its immorality, far from it. The fact is, it was scarcely immoral enough; and the girl's antecedents (she was still young) were not such as Snob felt socially proud of, whilst he would not have been seen in Bond-street with his small family for a trifle. But there were stories and legends current, like that of the appearance of the sea-serpent, of Snob being seen by one or other of his fast friends driving down to Snaresbrook, or some such retreat, on Sunday, with a string of merry little creatures holding on to his coat-tails, and a young creature all curls and smiles proudly hanging on to his arm. Nay, there was a story of his being seen in the act of propelling a perambulator, a double one, trebly occupied, in a very out-of-the-way part of the

suburbs. But, as one story founded on fact sometimes begets a young family of myths, we will not vouch for the truth of that humiliating narrative.

For some time after Swellingham's announcement, the pair puffed their cigars, which they had just lit.

"Who is it," inquired Snob, as we shall call him for the sake of brevity, "that Aubrway is running after now?"

"Why," replied his friend, "that girl who has just come out at the Thespis, and plays such tricks with the manager and the rest of them."

"What Dareall?"

"Yaas!"

"Oh!"

"And the best part of the joke is, that she can't endure the sight of the fellah, and is pawsitively helping to wuin him out of sheer contempt," said Fits.

"I heard yesterday that Aubrway is nearly cleaned out," rejoined Snob.

"I should think he is," was the reply. "Levy Moss told me last night that he has got lots of his paper, and don't mean to renew a single oblong."

"And to think that his parties should be among the best in London. It says in the 'Post' here, that there were three dukes, and let me see, nine peers there in that little place of theirs at their last night's 'thé.' Do, my dear Swellingham, try and get me a card for their Sunday nights, if you can. See about it while there is time, my dear fellah!"

"Quite impawsible!" was the answer of Fits, delivered with a cloud of smoke.

"And Levy Moss won't renew his bills. What a shockingly unequal world we live in!"

"Ha! ha! so I say," cried his friend. "Why haven't I half your money? I could spare you a very decent aristocratic connexion in return. Come, come, I dine there to-morrow, and I'll do what I can for you. But it stwikes me that Levy Moss is your man."

"Levy Moss," cried Snob. "Why he doesn't visit there surely?"

"No!" quoth Fits; "but he soon will. You can follow the sherwiff's officers when they take possession. Stingway says he dines there in constant expectation of seeing them come in, like the man who always went to Van Amburg's performances in the hope of seeing him devoured by the wild beasts. Poor Aubrway! Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! pore Aubrway," echoed Snob; "but do get me a card, before it is too late."

"Get me that two hundred, and I'll do the best I can," returned his friend. "But you see when a fellah, or a fellah's father has been in a wetail trwade, it is veway difficult to take him anywhere, that is, where any one goes. It would be far easier if you were a needy nobleman, suspected of having poisoned your own nieces for their money, especially if you'd got it, I should say. Talking of poisoning, it wouldn't so much matter if you were a brwewer. Society is doosid odd. It don't mind brwewers and bankers, and people in the coal-line, if they're only in a suf-

ficiently large way of business. A brute of an iron-master will pass muster, where a brassfounder or a tinman stands no chance. I must say I can't see why brwewing beer should be thought more corrwect than baking brwead, or killing sheep. Why wasn't your governor a brwewer, my dear Snob, instead of a——"

"Hush! my dear fellah!" interrupted Snob. "I wish you would be more cautious."

"There's no one within hearing," said Fits. "I wish you would afford me some prwetext besides mere money. If you were an amateur artist, for example, or belonged to the 'Melodious Vagrants,' or could assist in charwades, or cut out paper figures. You don't even bet! Can't you manage to lose a few ponies to Lord Sevensthemayne or Colonel Nobbleham! But I'll see what's to be done, and you must let me have fifty out of the two hundred down now."

Neither shabbiness nor thrift were among Snob's failings. He really liked Swellingham; partly because he was proud of knowing him, and being allowed to call him by his baptismal name, or its abbreviation Fits, and partly because Swellingham was a man any one might have liked, when divested of his outward affectation and nonsense. As for Snob altogether, his heart was right enough, when he was not intent upon imitating Swellingham's worst absurdities and peculiarities, and especially his pretended libertinism and worldliness. These two men were mere puppets of the period, creatures of the era in which they lived. It was the fashion to appear selfish and heartless, and they sought to be no better

than their superiors. Had it been the rage to visit hospitals and attend soirées at Bedlam and Colney Hatch, they would probably have done it with the utmost vigour and delight. You can't blame a man, who is born in the nineteenth century, if in some degree he comports himself accordingly. If he does not, he is pretty sure to come to grief, or at least is not likely to be a successful personage, a "man of the time." Suppose that a man speaks the truth in Parliament, such truth as every one feels, but judges it inconvenient to say aloud, what is his fate? He is extinguished by clamour, and becomes the butt of the House. If you brand a great and powerful man in public with the infamy for which he is notorious, in that second world of modern daily life, the world of conversational masonry in which truth is occasionally spoken—what is your fate? It would seem as if the crimes of the denouncee infected you, the denouncer. The mischief lies in the publication of such things. They may be as notorious as Scandal can make them, only Libel must beware. This is the safe-guard of every prosperous sinner, whose vices are undivulged before any public tribunal, and only furnish pleasant small-talk at the clubs and private dinner-tables of men. But human nature is not so universally bad after all; and there is a good deal of sterling virtue about, which might assert itself, if men were not ashamed of it, and if it were not old-fashioned, inconvenient, and absurd.

When Cervantes ridiculed the extreme follies and excesses of chivalry, he doubtless did not anticipate an epoch of lawyers, when the unselfish assertion and

maintenance of all truth and honour, and the unpaid rescue of all innocence and virtue should be termed "Quixotism," and dealt with like the aberrations of La Mancha's knight. Had he done so, he would possibly have preserved the memoirs of Amadis and Don Galaor, and burnt, in the interests of posterity, the lucubrations of Cid Hamet Benengeli in their stead.

CHAPTER IV.

MATRIMONIAL NEGLECT.

There is no cruelty greater than that of a heartless woman towards a man who adores her, but for whom she has no regard, save that of your "man of feeling" towards a woman whom he is forced to live with, when his affections have grown slack.—*From the Note-book of the late Solomon Trustall, LL.D.*

It was noon in Queen's-square. The domestics of the Aubrey family had been astir some two or three hours. The great Binsby had aired himself on the clean door-steps, and taken in a whiff of fresh air, and a drink of the glorious sunshine of a fine morning, and then retired with dignified seriousness to the discharge of his daily duties. Tops, the groom, had called for orders, but hearing that "master" had sent a note to "missus" the previous evening, and had not returned home all night, profited by the opportunity to remain below, and endeavour to obtain an interview for the purposes of courtship with Mrs. Susan, the lady's-maid. Blanche Aubrey, tired and anxious, had not yet made her appearance. In due time, Mrs. Susan came down, and Mr. Tops, under the pretence of asking if her mistress would want the

carriage, which he knew perfectly well she would not, followed her into the drawing-room, where the following conversation took place :

“Now stop a minute, do, can’t yer? What’s the hurry?” quoth Mr. Tops. “Wait till the bell rings. You air such a bolter, you air. Never quiet a minute, like——”

“There, that will do,” replied Mrs. Susan. “I don’t want any of your comparisons to brute animals, if you please. Besides” (tossing her head), “I’m not yet in harness, you see; no, nor likely to be for that matter, neither.”

“Now, don’t say that, Susan, when you’ve promised me so often.”

“Promises, Mr. Tops, are nothing on a lady’s part before marriage, as they don’t seem to be on the side of your treacherous sex after. I wonder you can have the impudence to ask me, considering how your master goes on. I couldn’t expect you to behave decently with such an example.”

“Masters,” returned Tops, oracularly, “is one thing, and grooms is another, and——”

“I hope for the sake of the poor deluded creatures who marry them, that they are,” said Susan; “but I’m not disposed to make the trial. But is your precious master ever coming home? Wherever is he got to?”

“You see, my dear,” replied the knight of the curry-comb, “a man must be somewheres. The governor is hout hall night, and hain’t said where he is? Well, as he hain’t ere, he must be there.”

“Where?” cried Susan.

"Why somewheres else, of course," was Mr. Tops's unsatisfactory answer.

"*You* know where he is," said Susan, "well enough. Cannot you give a plain answer to a plain question?"

"Not to sech a pretty gal as you air, as would win the Beauty Stakes heasy in a canter," was the gallant reply.

"None of your flattery, sir. Is the governor, as you call him, coming home this morning or not?"

"I should think he was," answered the incorrigible Tops, "for his home ain't likely to go to him, like the mountain to the Turkish gent, as I read of in the 'Sporting Life' yesterday. Talking of him, I can put you on to a cheesy thing for the 'Chester.' A young man in Sir Joseph's stable has give me the tip. Now do let me put a quarter's celery for you on to Mahomet. Its ten to one, and the hevent's sartain."

"Not I, indeed!" returned Mrs. Susan. "It may do for the Duchess of Marylebone and the Honourable Miss Fitz-gent to send their coachmen on such errands. They have no characters to lose."

"Marry come up!" exclaimed Tops, with energy.

"Marry, indeed!" said Mrs. Susan. "I'm in no such hurry. This is only my third season, I'd have you know, Mr. Tops."

"'Marry,' Susan," replied that worthy, "is an expreshun used at the Spring's Theayter, Pentonwill, in Elizabeth Ann's drayma, as the great Mr. Stingray says."

"And pray," inquired Mrs. Susan, with an in-

dignant toss of her head, which, as Tops afterwards said, put him in mind of a chesnut filly with tasselled nets shaking off the flies on a summer day; "who is Elizabeth Ann? One of your girls, I suppose. But tell me, whatever does make master go on so, fretting that poor dear creature's heart out as he does? Tell me this, and I'll go with you to Kew Gardens, my very first Sunday out, I promise."

"No bribery!" cried Tops. "Don't think to come old Sairey over me. Purity of helection and huniversal sufferin', is my mottar. Why I'd sooner rob master than tell on him, and hif I was a genelman, I know which I'd excuse fust. The fact is, me and master is in training for Parlimint, besides which, we're a writing a book on the gory liar, the great story-telling babboon of Afrikey. Now, suppose me and you was married?"

"Well, Mr. Tops," replied the lady, "just for a moment, for the sake of argument, I'll entertain so ridiculous an idea."

"Pink tops, white cords, real orange-blossoms, and sech a blow out! Kew Gardens and 'everlasting devotion,' as I heerd master say to missus when they was fust married."

"Yes," said Susan, "and if I was fool enough to have you, you'd be just such another."

"That," observed Tops, gravely, "is a event scratched clean out of the book of time."

"You mean the marriage?" asked Susan.

"No!" he replied; "I mean that hever I should be sech another as master, arter the event. As hif you didn't know what I mean!"

"Well, but what is your master after?" rejoined Susan. "Is it only gambling, or is it some designing wretch of a woman? Let me only come near her. I'd tear her eyes out; I'd spoil her looks for her, the creature, the female, the thing——" And here she seized Tops by the arm.

"Jest pinch a trifle softer—jest a trifle!" said that individual. "You're a reckoning some one up finely, you air. What's the caper?"

"Caper, indeed!" retorted the indignant Abigail. "A caper, you call it, you wretch! Here's my poor dear lamb of a mistress deserted for some brazen hussy. Hi! hi!"

"Jest pull up, will yer?" said Tops. "I can't stand them waterworks."

"You're no better than your master," rejoined the weeping lady's-maid.

"No better nor master!" exclaimed Tops. "That's coming it rayther too strong. Ajew, young woman, ajew!" and he pretended that he was about to depart.

"There! go along with you," said Susan. "I'm sure you're not wanted here."

"I'm going fast enough," answered Tops, re-approaching the object of his affections.

"If that is what you call going, I say 'stop!'" said Susan.

"It hain't no use axing me to let out on the governor; that's what I've come back to tell yer," observed Tops. "When I follows master, I sees nothink, I hears nothink, and I knows nothink, and if I did, I tells nothink. If I was to deceive him, I should de-

ceive you, afore I'd got well down to my work in the collar of materimony, shouldn't I?"

"Oh, Tops, Tops!" literally cried the equally faithful soubrette. "Think of that poor creature in her affliction. Were it not that I should have to leave her in it, I would never take so much as a cup of tea in this unhappy house again."

"There hain't a groom, nor a coachman for that matter," replied he of the stable, "no, not in hall this ere village of London, as likes his young missis better nor I do ourn. To please her I'd wait at table in Berlin gloves, and look arter a garden and a one 'oss chay. But for all that, I tells no tales on master, Susan: as a man, I don't split on a man."

"Go, then," replied Susan, indignantly, "and help him to deceive a poor lady like her. Go, sir, to your master and welcome for me; but never breathe an odious syllable of love to me again;" and with that Mrs. Susan flounced angrily out of the room.

Mr. Tops gave suppressed utterance to a long whistle, which it must be owned expressed a good deal. "Kicked clean over the traces!" he said. "What a power of chaff she do cut, surely. Shall I turn master up, or not? I must say he don't behave according, as that old pictur' card of a Binsby calls it. Hallo! here he is. Let hisself in with a door-key at twelve o'clock!"

As he said this, Mr. Tops endeavoured to make his escape before the "governor," as he styled him, could get up-stairs; but meeting him on the landing, touched his forelock, and said:

"I've just come in to know what horders there is to day, sir?"

"You here, Tops?" said his master. "Put the chesnut four-year-olds into the mail-phaeton, and come round at two o'clock to Wilton-place, you know. Look sharp! What are you waiting for?"

"The near chesnut 'oss is lame, sir, in his hoff fore-leg," replied the groom.

"Confound you!" said his master. "How did he get lamed, eh?"

"He shan't drive her in our trap, if I can 'elp it," quoth Tops to himself. (*Aloud.*) "He's very badly bruised in the frog—picked up a stone on Saturday."

"Well, put the mare in," said Aubrey.

"What! missus's mare?" asked Tops.

"Yes, you fool," was the ungracious answer. "You know your mistress will not ride again, and she goes beautifully in double harness."

"I've jest give her a dose of physic, sir," replied Tops, doggedly.

"Dash it!" cried his master. "This is too bad; with seven horses in my stable, I have never one to ride or drive."

"I beg pardon, sir," said Tops, "if I can't please you——"

"What! you rascal! say no more. You can leave when you please," said Aubrey. "This comes," he added to himself, "of putting confidence in a groom; yet I thought he was faithful and attached to me. I suppose I ought to have raised the scamp's wages, when I trusted him."

“Well, sir,” said Tops with some emotion, “I hope you’ll find one as will sarve you as true as I’ve done, and take care of the ’osses. I’ve lived with yer since I was a bwy (boy), and a better master I shan’t see, that’s sartain, but——”

“But what, sir?” inquired Aubrey.

“Oh, Mister Aubrey, sir, if I dared say. I was so happy, when you and missus used to drive out together, and now——”

“And now, sir?” was Aubrey’s interrogation.

“There is one has ’as took her place, as hain’t fit——”

“Stop! you confounded rascal!” thundered his master. “Lectured by my groom? Ha! ha! I suppose, sir, that you think I ought to have raised your wages—you fancy that I have not tipped you sufficiently, eh? Look you, you will leave this house to-night. Not another word. Begone! Send Thomas to me. I will see if he can harness the lame horse—eh! and the one in physic. Be off, sir! No, stay, and listen. Go and put the chesnuds in harness, in the phaeton, do you hear?”

“Yes, Mr. Arthur, sir,” almost blubbered poor Tops, “but I can’t see missus——” and the honest fellow fairly burst into tears, and ran down stairs to hide his emotion in the stable, so soon as he could get there, and to impart his sorrow to the horses.

“So!” said Aubrey to himself, “a pretty state of things! I hope I did not speak too loud. Ha! here comes my wife, with that precious maid of hers, Madam Susan. If I could find a way to get rid of her too, it wouldn’t be amiss. I hate the sight of

the confounded prying fool. These sort of people are always making mischief with their pretended interest and sympathy. But the women set up such a howl, when their privileges are attacked; and I suppose it is one of them to keep an idle, curious, impertinent minx like that."

During this muttered soliloquy, Mrs. Aubrey had slowly descended the stairs, and now stood before her savage and indignant husband.

"Is that you, Arthur?" she said, in accents that might have melted a Cheyenne Indian, had he been less infatuated.

"Yes," replied Aubrey. "Who else should it be?"

"You forget my infirmity, dear Arthur," said the poor lady.

"Nonsense!" was the rough rejoinder.

As he spoke their eyes seemed to meet, but, alas! it was not so. There was no speculation in her beautiful orbs. She was blind, stone blind; and yet he could answer her thus!

"Dear Arthur," she said, "I am so glad you have returned. I heard your footsteps half down the street."

"Did you indeed?" he said carelessly.

They entered while speaking the room where Aubrey had just held his brief conversation with Tops.

"Alas!" she replied, "it were better were it not so. Every change of tone reaches my heart through these unwilling portals" (pressing her hands on her ears),

“and sometimes I wish I were deaf as well as blind, Arthur.”

“Oh! for Heaven’s sake, Blanche, do not give me a dose of the sentimental. One would think you were dreadfully treated,” was the semi-brutal response.

“Nay, Arthur, when have I complained? But to-day——” she urged.

“Well, well, to-day—what of it? Last night I was kept out, but I explained it all in my note. We played at whist at the club till five, and I went home to Swellingham’s chambers, rather than disturb you and the house.”

“Disturb me? Do you think, then, that I slept?”

“I should hope so,” was the careless answer. “Look here, Blanche,” said her husband. “Do not be so dreadfully querulous. I own that yours is a sad trial and affliction; and I am sure I do all that I can under the circumstances. Is there anything I can do to please you?”

One would have thought, from the manner in which he spoke this, that he was the most attentive of husbands, quite a marital martyr, in fact.

A ray of pleasure shot across the face of Blanche, and for a moment the old sweet flush returned to her cheek. Her eyes had lost but little of their beauty, although there was a kind of cloudy indistinctness in their regard. They looked more like the eyes of a saint in some picture mellowed by time. She had not grown old; but she looked as if an age had swept over her, and carried with it all the brightness and freshness of her young life.

"Oh, Arthur!" she said, "come home early, and give me one entire evening. I have had such a strange dream this morning about us both. I know it is dull for you; and yet you said, when this terrible affliction first threatened me, that you cared not, if I could reconcile myself to my fate, since you could never know a jealous pang, never find your home deserted. And yet, dear, before I became blind, you had not much cause to blame the truant disposition of your wife."

"I suppose," returned her husband, "you mean to say that *I* am a truant. Pray cease for once to allude to your affliction, as you call it. I am sure I never speak of it more than is absolutely necessary. Of course, I am very grieved that you cannot come out and accompany me as you did before; but you can hardly expect me to remain at home always."

"Cannot come out!" breathed poor Blanche to herself. "Oh, Heavens! does he ever ask me?" (*Aloud.*) "Nay, dear Arthur, though I cannot ride out on horseback, I could go with you in the carriage sometimes. Oh! do, dear, take me out with you in the phaeton to-day. I should so like it."

The guilty conscience of Aubrey here touched him to the quick. What was the meaning of this? Did she suspect anything? Had Tops really betrayed him? No, no! Her manner was far too affectionate for that. So he said aloud:

"I am sorry I cannot to-day. Your faithful groom has made a hospital of the stables, and I have just discharged him in consequence."

“Discharged Tops?” exclaimed Blanche.

“Yes,” answered her husband, “and why not, I pray?”

“Poor Tops!” she said. “Oh, Arthur, how changed you are!”

“Changed!” vociferated Aubrey. “It is time to change, when a man has no peace at home for tears, and reproaches, and sentiment, and that sort of thing. I tell you, I hate this snivelling and crying. What have I done? What do I do, to merit it? Is there anything in the world you want? Did I not send to Paris last Tuesday for Doctor De Latour for your eyes? Do I not load you with presents and luxuries? Do I not put up, for your sake, with the insolence of your maid? Have I not given up my intention to shoot this year in Scotland! Good God! Mrs. Aubrey, what would you have?”

“Yourself—your heart, Arthur,” was the reply. “I was a poor governess, I know, when you married me. Nay, do not frown and be impatient. You saw me accidentally and courted me, and I refused you, left the kind people who then sheltered me—for your sake, not for mine, Arthur, for I loved you from the first. You followed me, and discovered me in my new situation, where I was treated like a menial, in the great contractor’s service, weeping over an insult just received from one of his purse-proud daughters. You claimed me, and I was yours, because you willed it—yours by a love whose pride rose to the level of your impassioned generosity.”

“Well, well, dear! it is all quite true. It is not I

who remind you of all these things. What have you to complain of? Are you sorry that you accepted my hand?"

"For your sake, I am. For myself, I grieve as little as I may. You fancied that you loved me. You did love me for awhile; and now I were far happier and better back again in the sordid coal-owner's family, than living here a burden and an annoyance to you."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Blanche!" said Aubrey, softened by her appeal, "you are no burden to me, love. How can you talk so? There, don't cry. You drive me away from you, I declare. Do you mean to say that I neglect you, because of your unfortunate calamity?"

"No, no, Arthur!" she replied, eagerly, "you are too generous for that. You cannot help it, dearest! Other eyes, not darkened like these poor orbs, flash on your path—others can participate better in your pleasures and your amusements. I no longer attract others—I who cared not to attract any, save you alone, and you have grown careless of one so entirely your own. But let me say no more. I thought not to have said this. In the long weary hours of the night, I think that if I could only talk to you, you would love me again as of old. But it is not so. I only weary you. Forgive me. You are going out, are you not, dearest? Do not let me keep you, but come home earlier for the sake of your health. I could have wished that to-day—but no matter."

"What of to-day in particular?" asked Aubrey.

"It is an anniversary," she replied.

“An anniversary? Of what?”

“Of the day,” answered Blanche, “when you married an orphan girl, who brought you no dowry, save her heart.”

“And a dear good little heart it is,” he replied. “There, love, don’t be so dismal. I declare you make me quite miserable. There, I will stop at home all day; though I had promised—that is, I will come home at four, in time to take you out before dinner. I want to bring you a little present—a bracelet. It was to have been a surprise.”

“A surprise!” thought Blanche, “and he did not even remember the anniversary of our wedding-day. If you knew how happy you make me, dearest,” she said aloud, “you would often be thus kind to me; indeed you would.”

“There, good-bye, God bless you, dear!” said her husband, who felt at that moment what a scoundrel and hypocrite he was, and determined to buy the costliest bracelet that he could obtain on credit. Such presents often resemble the “conscience money,” which a superstitious rogue pays to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to the astonishment of poorer and honest men. We knew a rakish husband once who never omitted to take a handsome present home, whenever he deceived his wife.

Arthur Aubrey imprinted a hasty kiss on the fair brow that pillowed itself a moment in renewed hope and happiness on his breast, and then hurried off, saying:

“I’ll be back at half-past four punctually. There’ll be lots of time, as we dine at seven, you know, dear.”

Blanche sighed involuntarily at the loss even of the half-hour thus carelessly intimated ; but, on the whole, she felt more joyful and contented than she had done for weeks ; and when Susan entered, in a quarter of an hour, she found her still standing where Aubrey had left her, with a smile on her face so radiant, that as that faithful attendant described it soon afterwards to Tops, it put her in mind of a saint on a painted window in one of those foreign Catholic churches in France.

“Come,” said her mistress, “I want you to take in my green silk-fluted dress with the purple trimmings that I had from Paris last month. I don’t want to look thin, you know, and I mean to wear it to-day. Don’t you remember how your master admired it, the day I first put it on?”

“Yes, mum !” said Mrs. Susan, aloud, “it does become you beautiful ;” and to herself, “I’d see him far enough before I put on anything he admired, that I would, the nasty, unfeeling, selfish brute. I should like to know whose fault it is, the dear angel has grown thinner. Ugh ! I should like to strangle him in it, I should, and all such wretches. Well, I wish him no worse than to see himself as I see his wicked conduct at this blessed minute.”

CHAPTER V.

RED LAMPS AHEAD!

My heart is ice, my brain is hot,
 He loves me not, he loves me not ;
 He for whom my wild eyes grew
 Daily softer and more true ;
 He for whom I would have given
 All the debt I owe to Heaven,
 Tramples on this aching breast—
 Let me, let me be at rest !

The Complaint of the Forsaken.

AN explanation is due of the change which had come over the dream of the Aubreys' domestic bliss. But three years before, we saw them "loving and being loved," to borrow the title of a charming novel by Mrs. A. Maillard. How was it that Blanche had thus realised the awful affliction which we have thus incidentally described ? How came it that the very nature and character of Aubrey had undergone such fatal transformation in so short a time ? The truth is, to answer the last interrogation first, that Aubrey had lately fallen into evil ways. Surfeited with his wife's affection ; subjected to the worst influences, and the most pernicious examples ; growing desperate in the face of ruin, that seemed approaching him with

gigantic strides ; living a dissipated and useless life ; constantly under the exciting influence of wine, though far from being a tippler or a drunkard ; stifling thought, and hating himself for what he was when he did think, Mr. Aubrey was a changed man—the victim of frivolity, bad habits, idleness, and enduring “*le pénible fardeau de n’avoir rien à faire.*” Blanche’s affliction at first alarmed and shocked, and then bored him. It is a hopeless case when a man comes to say of the dearest tie of life, “What a bore !” There was something unutterably mean and cowardly in his conduct, and he knew it ; but yet persisted in his course. If it were possible to sustain a single mitigating plea for him, a single “*circonstance extenuante,*” as the French are apt to do for their worst criminals, it was that his union had not been blessed with offspring, and he had at first longed deeply and tenderly for a child. Now, he had ceased to regret this deprivation, and was rather inclined to look upon it as a piece of luck. So selfish, so hardened and blinded, had this man become ; the spoiled child of fortune, deaf to sense and reason, squandering his last resources and means of redemption in heartless extravagance, borrowing money at ruinous rates of interest—in short, leading just that life which astonishes us now and then in the revelations of our Bankruptcy and Divorce Courts ; when we can only refer the actions of such a man, who has spurned every blessing, and embraced ruin and disgrace with open arms, to the restless promptings and unaccountable caprices of a disordered brain.

The commencement of Aubrey’s neglect of the

being whom he had so ardently wooed and won took place about a year before the period of the conduct which we are now reluctantly compelled to describe. For six months or so, it had been very gradual, and his angelic partner had herself unselfishly encouraged him to seek amusement and distraction from home. Poor thing! She said to herself, "I must not tire him of home;" and not only accorded him unquestioned liberty, but would say to him playfully, "I must not pin you to my apron-strings," and "you see, dear, what a sensible little wife I am." So he went about shooting and yachting with his friends, and visited Doncaster and Newmarket, and at last actually went to Paris for a fortnight alone. From that visit, which she at least in appearance cheerfully permitted, though, to speak the truth, it cost her many secret tears, might be dated the actual era of neglect and even harshness. Then Blanche began to pine and fade. She became visibly thinner and lost her beautiful wild-rose tint. One would have thought this might have reclaimed her husband's truant and fickle heart. At first he displayed some sympathy and regret. But in place of telling her that he must remain more constantly at home, he continually told her that she did not go out sufficiently often. Why did she not visit this friend, or that? Why did she not go to balls, or concerts, without him? There was the carriage, why did she not drive out oftener? There was her horse, why did she not ride it unattended, save by her groom? Other ladies do it. Besides, did she not know plenty of ladies, who rode on horseback in the Park? Then he was always engaged in affairs

—business with the lawyers. This was his frequent excuse for being fretful and short in his answers. Other wives would be delighted to have so much liberty. There was one odious phase of married selfishness on the part of a husband, in which he certainly did not indulge. He never grudged her any expense; never denied her any amount of money. Alas! he had no occasion; for she was as economical, as he was thriftless. Not mean; for she had her little charities, and no household was ever better administered; but though she little knew their real position, she easily divined that Aubrey was overstepping the bounds of prudence, and living above his income. And besides, she never forgot in her own mind that she brought him no dowry, no accession of fortune. When they were married, she had persistently refused a settlement, much to the regret and annoyance of Lady Courcy, who held such a disposition to be at once a prudent and a necessary thing.

Poor Blanche! Could she have gone out cheerfully without her husband; could she have indulged in ever so slight a platonic flirtation; could she have contrived to make Aubrey feel the slightest insecurity in the tenure of her devoted affections, how much might she have been spared! We are inclined to think that, even had she known “the way to keep him,” she would not have acted otherwise; could not have played a part; could not have sullied the virgin purity of her soul by even the passing shadow which a plot to retain her husband’s affections must necessarily have reflected upon it. For that shadow must

have been cast by some other man. Certain it is that Aubrey's jealousy would not have been very easily aroused. And, to enhance all, she was left, by the sudden death of Lady Courcy, without either counsellor or true friend. That estimable lady saw, with inexpressible grief and pain, the blight which threatened her young protégée's happiness, and she was on the point of warning her, when she was unhappily removed from the scene by the stern summons of death. Latterly Blanche had fallen into a sickly and nervous state. Still she complained not; and her faithful maid, Susan, with that young person's confidant and admirer, Tops, were the only individuals who really knew the sum of her suffering and its real cause. True, a physician had been called in. On this Aubrey insisted. Perhaps he thought to repair through medicine the ravages which his own neglect was making with such cruel and effective haste. The physician prescribed air and exercise, and change; and these, apart from her husband, Blanche mildly refused to take. She did not say why; but she neglected the doctor's commonplace injunctions, with an uncomplaining resolution which her husband called obstinacy, and which sometimes made him very angry and unkind. At length, one night, when he returned home and found her sitting up, to his great annoyance and disgust, he observed a peculiar expression in her face, which caused him a pang of alarm and self-reproach.

"I wish to Heaven," he said, "Blanche, that you would go to bed, like a sensible woman, and take

more care of your health. Why do you go on like this?"

"Oh, Arthur!" she replied, "you know how ill and nervous I have been lately. It is not my fault, dearest, indeed it is not."

"Your fault?" observed Aubrey, "why no, not exactly, though I do think you are very obstinate in not going out more, and taking better care of yourself. You remain at home, until you get your head full of sick fancies."

"Fancies!" said Blanche, meekly; "I wish they were fancies. Are the dreadful shooting pains in my head, fancies? Oh, Arthur! you would not say so if you knew; and now, this very evening," she said, "you don't know what a fright I have had. Do you know, dear!" she continued, rising and trembling in every limb, whilst an ashy pallor spread over her beautiful face; "do you know," she uttered very slowly, "I believe that I am becoming blind!"

"Pooh, pooh!" said her husband. Mere fancy!" But he was forced to admit the dread truth of the fact, when Blanche staggered into his arms with a shriek, and cried with shrill, small voice, that seemed torn from the inmost depths of an agonising breast, "I cannot see you, husband, dear. I cannot see you," and then burst into a passionate fit of sobbing, which could not be controlled.

"Not see me?" cried Arthur; "nay, look again. This lamp does not give the best of light. You are tired, dear. It is a passing cloud of indigestion. It is something floating before your vision. 'Muscæ

volitantes,' the doctors call it. Why I have had it myself more than once," he added, cheerfully. "Come, look at me now. Don't you see me smiling at your foolish fears?"

"I hear your voice—I feel the pressure of your arms," replied Blanche, still sobbing, and panting like a wounded bird; "but I am blind, stone blind. I saw darkly, as it were in shadows, before you came; and now I see nothing, nothing at all."

Aubrey felt her weight suddenly press heavily upon him, and perceived she had fainted in his arms. He rang up the household, and sent for a physician, who prescribed remedies, and ordered the room to be darkened, and said that her sight would soon be restored.

But it was not. And what is more, the cause of it seemed to baffle all the faculty. There was no cataract formed or forming, no spot, no film; but those large and beautiful eyes suddenly became deprived of sight, and for three months Blanche Aubrey had been totally blind. For awhile, Aubrey's attentions had been incessant; but they soon fell off, and at the time we have again raised the curtain on our *dramatis personæ*, his neglect was as complete and cruel, as it was unstudied. On the very night when the mantle of darkness fell on his devoted partner, he had, by some strange coincidence, been introduced to a fascinating creature, who now already occupied all his spare time and thoughts. He had never received the slightest encouragement from her; and this, if anything, made his conduct more despicable and unpardonable. Were it not strictly true, such folly

and wickedness would seem impossible. Alas! of what is human nature not capable? Our motives are as varied and various in their intricate workings as our countenances and their expressions, and more mysterious, because they are unseen.

Each breast a whirring clock whose dial lies,
Each face false dial to that plotting breast;
Each heart the weight its brief sad task that plies,
Till the vext puppet gasping sinks to rest.

There are plenty of Nature's curled darlings as bad as Arthur Aubrey, and many worse. He was vain, imaginative, idle, and pampered. But the man was not really bad at heart.

"Impossible!" cry our fair readers. "The wretch, the unfeeling brute, the monster!"

"My dear madam," we reply to one, "what shall we say about a certain affair in which your respectable husband was involved, when he married you?"

There was a poor girl committed suicide in the Hoxton Canal a few days after the wedding, who—— But you know all about it, and considered him, we believe, rather in the light of the victim on that occasion, although *he* was not drowned, nor put even to the cost of a cheap funeral, when the violent, and, as you are assured, scheming and drunken girl of eighteen, the daughter of a diabolical small farmer in Huntingdonshire, met her end. Shall we explain to you, mademoiselle, how your affianced lover has just quietly put an end to his domestic felicity in the Regent's Park—fair girl, pony-carriage, love-birds, Java sparrows, Newfoundland dog, cottage piano, and all? After nine years' domestication there, it seemed

rather hard; and so that good-for-nothing hussy doubtless thought it, when the furniture was sold up.

Ah, we see you know it already; and yet you will marry dear Charles, and not be very angry with him, so that you are certain it is all ended, all over with *her*. A man must sow his wild oats, you know.

All we say is, that there are plenty of worse instances of heartlessness than that of Aubrey, of which no one takes any account at all. We do not mean to defend or palliate his offence for one moment. We should like to kick such a fellow down-stairs, to upset his phaeton, break his leg or arm, and otherwise punish him for his criminal folly, his stupid sin. All we mean to say is, that Society frequently condones, if it may not be accused of patronising, worse conduct than that of Aubrey towards his hapless and beautiful wife. Look at that tawny officer and gentleman, who deliberately wins the foolish affections of a friend's wife, to leave her within a few short months lost and blighted, to die, or worse. Yet such men are received in almost every house; mothers fling their daughters at their heads, if they are rich; and fathers invite them to dinner. They have been a little "wild," that is the term. Some people call it "gay." He is a "gay" deceiver, a Lothario, the ladies say; whilst shrinking from the contact of the less criminal partner of his guilt, as if she were a leper, or smitten with the plague. This is, of course, when they are legally found out. We know how Lycisca would have blamed Valeria in the Roman tale, had the alleged misdeeds of the latter been mentioned in the drawing-room of the former. But does not this

kind of thing extend throughout all classes? The policeman bears loud witness against the ticket-of-leave man ; the attorney-at-law denounces the thief. Justice is an excellent thing, when it is well administered ; only unfortunately that is so rarely the case, one begins to doubt the abstract existence of such a phenomenon in human affairs. "Tomkins is an excellent fellow when he is sober," said an Irish panegyrist ; "the mischief of it is that he is always drunk."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIREN IN HER CAVE.

Aha! pious sir or virtuous madam, do you deny it? Must you shut your eyes to it? Does it not exist? Is it not a sufficiently marked portion of modern existence? Do you ever drive in the Park, madam? Do you read your daily paper, sir? Have you never seen the "Saturday Review" on this and kindred subjects, such as French manners, and the female attire of the period? I think you will find the matter—treated seriously, of course—in one or other even of the "Quarterlies." Ha! young lady, what is that which you asked your brother just now? Whether the "belle Impéria" has not changed the colour of her hair? *You*, at any rate, *folle mignonne!* know what is going on around you, in this doll-show of a female fashionable world. *You* are well versed in the equipages of the demi-monde, and can tell whom Lais and Phryne have entangled in the false meshes of their yellow tresses, or on whom the dark-browed Rhodope, hight Cora, smiles with the fascination of a *Succube*, unscathed of the Inquisition and "Maistre Johan de la Haye." You talk of it, think of it, and sometimes envy and imitate the style, do you not? Truly, when you pass these Sirens, you put no cotton in your ears!—*From the Note-book of Solomon Trustall, LL.D.*

SEATED in a moderately sized drawing-room, furnished richly, but with exquisite taste, in a small but aristocratic-looking house in Wilton-place, the day after the events which we have just narrated, was a young lady, who might have numbered some two and three and twenty summers. Her form was slight, but rounded; her head small, and placed on her slender throat with admirable poise; and her

hands and feet, the latter cased in a small pair of white moccasins, embroidered with moose-hair, by Indian skill, were of the most delicate proportions and shape. Her mass of light-brown hair, which was shot, silk-like, with a golden hue, was thrown off the face, and formed into a roll behind, confined by a simple stiletto of gold, in a style which a sea-nymph's toilette could not have surpassed in perfect but unstudied grace. The expression of her large grey eyes was most peculiar. At one moment they had an almost animal-like vivacity and brightness, reminding the gazer involuntarily of those of a beautiful tawny pard; at another, they had a soft and beseeching look, which might have been worn by Helen, when she besought favour and forgiveness at old Priam's hands. Then there were rare moments, when an intense melancholy which shadowed her whole aspect filled those grey orbs with an undefinable tenderness, so sympathetic and so sorrowful, that you could not help thinking of what Beatrice Cenci might have been, had her young life been spared, when dreamily gazing in some conventual retreat at the dark cypresses and pines bordering her garden walk in the glowing sunset of an Italian eve. But these moments were rare indeed, and those who were privileged to witness them were few. Her general expression was one of extreme archness and gaiety, mingled with mutinerie and daring. The shape of her nose was quite suited to give effect to this expression. It was a Greek nose spoiled for the purposes of classical sculpture by being slightly *retroussé*; but we can venture to say that no one

would have wished it to have preserved a severer regularity of outline. Her mouth, too, was a trifle wide, at least, so it seemed by the breadth and fulness of her lower lip. It was, perhaps, a slightly sensual mouth; but curved with the sweetest good-nature. Her teeth were exquisitely pearly and regular; her brow wide, but by no means lofty. This arose from no want of intellectual development, but from the simple fact that her hair grew low. Her complexion was clear, but not dazzlingly white. If we were to search for a poetical comparison, we should prefer calling it ivory, rather than alabaster in its hue. But the colour of her cheeks, which never increased much, though it might and did vanish sometimes, leaving a forlorn wanness in its place, was like that of a winter rose, or the pink inside of a sea-shell. Perhaps we have been most forcibly reminded of her by one of those statuettes *en biscuit* which we see now so often in the shop-windows—one of a girl with head thrown back and arms stretched behind her; a saucy, provoking, mischievous, laughing demoiselle, infinitely more attractive than Joan of Arc, and other statuettes without turned-up noses and bewitching coquetry of attitude and expression.

We have been at all these pains to describe this young lady, because it is necessary to state that she could not be called either handsome or beautiful. Imagine her plainly and unbecomingly attired, and carrying a parcel or a bandbox in the street, and you might pass her a dozen times without particular notice. You would never say, "What a handsome, what a striking girl!" But if you ever happened to

be placed for a brief time in her society, if she once attracted your attention, if you noticed her *espièglerie*, her wit, her humour, her singularity of ideas and expressions, her playfulness and rapid elegance of movement, startling but never boisterous, abrupt but never angular, wayward, capricious, shifting as Undine, but Undine with a soul, it is certain that your very prejudices would be disarmed and captivated, and if you did not come away her lover, you would, at least, her friend.

She was dressed in white muslin, with a light blue tunic in points. Round her waist was a blue-and-gold cord, with tassels of the same colours. The only ornament she wore was a gold crucifix, with four turquoises of remarkable magnitude, and turquoise ear-rings, each a single stone, mounted in plain gold, in ears which seemed even smaller by the contrast with a certain massiveness in these ornaments.

Shall we describe the furniture of the room? We will simply say that it was chiefly of white and gold. There was not a single mirror or looking-glass around. But the pictures were chiefly representations of the fair occupant herself, and they were certainly curious in their variety of costume and style. There was one, a kit-cat, life-size, which represented her leaning out of an opera-box, dressed in a rose-coloured domino, with the hood thrown back and a mask in her hand. In one water-colour, she was depicted driving a pair of grey horses in a phaeton with marvellous ease and dash. In another, she was mounted, and in the act of taking a fence and

some four or five yards of water at a flying leap, with a gentleman in scarlet and his steed half-immersed beneath her horse's feet. Half a dozen prints of her in various theatrical costumes, and a variety of photographs, next engaged the attention, and a set of crayons completed the series. One of these represented her leaning back, dressed as an Odalisque, and smoking a cigarette. In another, she was attired in a species of Bloomer costume, and appeared with a small double-barrelled gun in her hand, at what was apparently a pigeon-match, with—alas! that we should record such bad taste—a very pronounced bull-dog at her feet. The third was a woodland sketch, and in this she was seen accompanied by a brace of spaniels and a terrier, brushing the early dew, in a tunic of Lincoln green and with a golden baldric, at the "pheasant hunt," as our neighbours would call it. A grim forester a few yards behind—keeper we should call him now-a-days—attested, by a leash of slain "long-tails" and a hare which he carried, her Amazonian prowess. A billiard sketch, a skating party, and a river scene, in which a young lady in a blue Garibaldi, pulling in an outrigger, whom, without much difficulty, we might easily conclude to be the same versatile and ubiquitous divinity, completed the series.

Seated on an embroidered ottoman, which was certainly not her own work—for the needle was not this young lady's forte, and a sewing-machine was about the only thing, as one of her admirers said, in which she could not be backed to distance any one of her sex, age and weight, in a canter—and

leaning upon a table, covered with nick-nacks—among which was a jewelled riding-whip under a glass-case, won in a steeple-chase, as was duly recorded on an accompanying gold horse-shoe—the fair subject of our somewhat elaborated description was engaged in looking over a number of cards and notes, to some of which she accorded but slight interest, while with others she seemed amused, or pleased. At length, she opened one, which evidently caused her no little annoyance, if not disgust. She bit her lip and frowned; and then, rising, tore it into minute fragments, and flung it into the grate. Then her look of displeasure deepened and softened into that twilight gloom of retrospective thought which we have before touched upon and endeavoured to describe. It was as if the contents of the note had reminded her of some dark mystery, some forgotten trouble.

“I must put an end to this,” she mused. “It suits neither me nor him. It recalls things I would forget—do forget, save for these obtrusive annoyances. I hate that man for the very kindness which he once conferred on me, when I couple it with this odious persecution now. Ah! if he only knew. Let me see—what shall I do? I have tried to disgust him with vulgarity and caprice, with the extravagance of my demands, and the insolence of my slights. Yet he comes fawning like a spaniel to my feet again. And then, to think of his cruelty to that poor creature, his wife! I have ordered my door to be shut in his face, in vain. I am sure to meet him somewhere—he knows all my set. Come what will, I will put an end to it this very day, if I have to insult

him publicly, if I strike him with my whip in the Park. No, no, I could not do that, when I think how he once—— Well, no matter, it must and shall be done. He is my *bête noire*, a shadow in the path of my career. How late Luckless is. Poor Harry, he can't keep an appointment even with me. I believe that he was even born late; and married he certainly never can be, as he would not be in time for the ceremony. Of all my crowd of flatterers and admirers, the only one whom I am perfectly at ease with, is Harry. I let him see me, even in my black fits, my moments of shuddering depression. He executes all my little commissions, even those of charity, which any one, save he, would make fun of, or treat with ridicule and contempt. He is the only one before whom I can be entirely natural, and need never act. And yet I do believe that there is no one else for whose opinion I really care. Dear Harry, how well his very faults become him, fit him like an unpaid-for coat; while the selfish vices of others disfigure them like the costumes of an English masquerade, which they never can carry bravely or at ease. Let me see, where have I shot him off this morning? I said to him yesterday, 'I wonder you don't get tired of these commissions. Some day I shall fire you off as usual, and you will not return.' 'Ah!' he answered, 'I am just a boomerang in your hands, you cruel creature! It matters not how you throw me about, I am sure to return to your feet.' Heigho! I really do think if ever I were silly enough to marry, I should choose Luckless for a husband. Nobody ever did take care of him, I'm sure; and I believe I could manage him

to perfection, without a touch of whip or spur. Ah! there he is at last. Now if it were any one else at the door, I should rush off to put my hair straight, or to see how I look, or keep him waiting just for mischief, or form's sake, or send my dear old stupid sheep-dog, Lacy, to mind him, until I had read my new part, or tried on a dress, or done anything, save hurry myself to grant an audience, whoever the visitor might be."

Such were the real sentiments of the fascinating young actress, to whom half of the roués and coxcombs of London were paying their homage at this period, not to mention a good number of respectable wealthy hypocrites, and a few earnest fools besides. For she had lately taken the town by storm, and her appearance at the Theatre Royal Thespis, as *the* goddess of burlesque, was the theme of universal comment, admiration, and delight.

Among her more prominent admirers was Sir Harry Luckless, whom she knew previous to her début, and who was popularly supposed to have introduced her to the great manager, actor, and playwright, Methusalem Wigster. Also the Duke of Chalkstoneville, whose conquest she achieved attired as Apollo, on her first appearance in the burlesque of "Marsyas," in which the puns were so plentiful, and yet so indistinct, that it was like a milky-way of wit, or, as the author would have doubtless written, "whey." No one could discern a separate star or constellation of cleverness in its composition; but the whole was pronounced, in the words of a modern critic, to be "scintillating with the brightest corus-

cations of genius." The fact is, the author was himself a dramatic critic, the surest way in these days to get a footing on the stage. "You should read it in italics, my boy," said one of the successful playwright's admirers. "By Jove, sir, there is a pun in every line, only these confounded actors and actresses won't italicise in their delivery, as they ought."

We must own that the difficulty of the burlesque interpreter was great. Conceive such lines as the following put in Cupid's mouth, to a tune founded on "Lesbia hath a beaming Eye." It must be understood, as a matter of course, that Marsyas was represented as an Ethiopian serenader with a banjo.

Ma's eye has (Marsyas) a glance of fire
 To frizzle this unhappy nigger, oh!
 When great Sol his truthful lyre (liar)
 Twangs, in mangrove thicket twig her, oh!
 Sitting with her doves at play,
 That cooey, cooey, o'er his failure,
 All the long Algerian day (dey),
 On Afric's shore in South Australia.

(CHORUS, *with dance.*)

Ri tum chokee, Tantia Topee tight;
 For he's got no friends, and it sarves him right.

Notwithstanding all that sense might urge, and possibly did urge—only no one listened to it—against this astounding rubbish, the burlesque was pronounced a "screaming" success; and when the fascinating actress to whom we have just introduced our readers, in her private bower, appeared in blue satin trunk-hose, and seemed to play on a gilded "testudo," the sounds which were rendered by the fat thumb of the leading violinist in the orchestra, the applause was tremendous, and all London was

set humming, whistling, and singing, not only "Ri tum chokee Tantia Topee tight," but the charming songs of "Buskins and Garters," and "Skin him alive, oh!" with which Apollo himself, or rather herself, enraptured the audiences of the Thespis. If, on the one hand, it may be said that folly and bad taste could go no further, it must be admitted on the other, that they were charmingly embellished by the archness and elegance of the *débutante*, who certainly could not be held answerable for the style of entertainment in vogue. Nay, her acting and appearance on the boards of the Thespis Theatre would really have redeemed even worse stuff than that of which we have just given a sample. Be that as it may, Miss Dareall soon became the "rage," and was at that moment, in spite of Exeter Hall and morality, the most popular woman in London. Exeter Hall, did we say? Why "la belle Impéria" herself, of whom we have made mention in the heading to this chapter, was not more run after by the Church, of course merely to see her act, and condemn the follies of the day, than was our bewitching actress. Who did not go to see her? Who that had been once, could help going a second time, and a third? What critiques were lavished on her by the Press! Every one was enamoured of her, more or less, after his several fashion. As for Methusalem Wigster, she could do just what she pleased with him. She actually made him appear charitable and good-natured. He gave a benefit, at her suggestion, for the wife of his stage-manager, who had run away with another woman, and left her with his three

children to starve. He increased the salary of the ballet-girls and "soups" under her threat to leave such a miserly hole, if he refused to comply. The great Drivel of the "Daily Blight" wrote a column and a half about her, under the heading of "Realistic Pulchritude of the Modern Stage."

There was but one dramatic critic whose comments were an exception to the rule. This gentleman feigned the most virtuous indignation at her success. We need hardly say that he was one of the most distinguished moral guardians of social ethics in his generation. At the same time, it is only fair to state that he did it solely in the interests of a music-hall, in which he had privately invested some fifteen years' earnings on a highly moral and religious serial, and the proceeds of a pen, which had been also for a still longer period devoted to writing a certain species of biographical works and social sketches for the book-sellers in Holywell-street, Strand. It must be said for him that he did everything with an eye to business. He had no heart, no feeling, no sympathy, and apparently no bias. Literature to him was mere copy furnished by a facile talent, according to price and demand. Nor is this the only remarkable instance of literary versatility which has come under our notice, although in its peculiar phase of depravity and successful hypocrisy, it stood perhaps alone.

We once knew a gentleman who wrote an account of prize-fights for a well-known sporting paper, and the most orthodox articles for a Church Review of ponderous celebrity, at one and the same time. He kept a rusty black suit and a relay of "white

chokers" at the office of the sporting paper, wherewith to indue his outer man for the discharge of his more sacred calling. He was the first specimen of "muscular Christianity" with whom it fell to our lot to become acquainted, and a very worthy fellow he was, with a large wife and small family dependent upon his intellectual exertions. A bishop in the grooves of prosperity is one thing, and a dog-stealer out of luck is another, and there is a great worldly, if not unworldly difference between them; but if they have both of them children whom they maintain, wives whom they love, and parents whom after their individual fashion they cherish or honour, there is a wonderful magnetic chain of sympathy which unites their hearts. None can say where the bishop ends and the poodle-abstracter begins, and *vice versâ*. Which is the greater libeller, ourselves thus generalising, or a modern novelist of a different school describing the minutest thoughts and incidents of the episcopal inner life? Strip the earthly mean and great to the buff, and what are they? Let all mankind bathe together, and scramble for the clothes!

When the British public is entertained by an actress, or for some reason or other more especially a great vocalist of the fair sex, it is singularly tolerant of scandal. It actually deifies immorality, personified in a songstress. If she happens to be a foreigner, her very vices enter into household conversational stock, from a bishop's palace to a back parlour in Bloomsbury. Materfamilias, who would drive away a servant-girl to perish in the streets for the slightest exhibition of levity, thinks nothing of asking if "la

diva" is still living with the last nobleman or male dancer she "ran away" with, while that model of propriety, Miss Clementina Popham, of Cadogan-place, Belgravia, and Bournemouth (it was formerly Gravesend which she patronised) inquires if that dear, wicked, handsome Pollio, the *primo tenore* of the season, has broken the last *amourette*—in which the upper and middle circles of Society take such a lively interest.

Some such thoughts as these may have passed through the little racer-like head of the petted young actress, as she looked at the timepiece, which represented an unlucky Cupid just caught in the clutches of the fell Destroyer, while chasing a butterfly lit upon a full-blown rose with malachite leaves. "How late he is," she poutingly murmured; "but it is no use being angry with him. I dare say his excuses will be as amusing as ever. That man could not be in time, if he were intrusted with a reprieve for his dearest friend, who was left for execution." At that moment the door opened, and the servant announced Sir Harry Luckless.

That individual approached with a comic expression of regret on his handsome Irish face.

"Upon my honour——" he began.

"Upon your honour, sir, I really don't know if I shall accept your apologies. Come, shall I make your excuses for you? You were on your way, when you met an old friend who just wanted your name for a month to a bill, an 'oblong' as you foolish creatures call it, to save his credit, as if he had any to save, and you couldn't help obliging him,

and there was not a place where they sell stamps handy, and then you just went into the 'Rag' for five minutes to write it, and met young Snaffles of the 141st, who wanted you to look at his new mare, and then you got talking about racing, and made a bet or two, and you forgot to wind up your watch, and didn't know the time—of course there are no clocks in the club—and then you took the very slowest cab that you ever rode in. There, you see I know all about it. Don't say a word more. I forgive you. You can't help it. Now, have you seen to all my little affairs? Not one I dare say."

"Indeed, I have!" said Sir Harry; "the man says he must keep Topsy a fortnight longer at least. He thinks it is distemper."

"And the harness?" inquired the lady.

"Will be ready on Tuesday. Wheeler and Biffin had to send to Paris for the bells."

"And the opera box?" she rejoined.

"Sams has kept his word. He could have had double the money this morning."

"Very well, sir, and did you give the money I told you to those poor people?"

Sir Harry assented.

"Yourself?" she continued.

"Never was in such a place in my life—wasn't comfortable till I had a bath after, and changed my clothes—gave them to my groom, 'pon honour. What a strange girl you are, to send a fellow on such an errand. How do you know I will not get a fever? But you are such a dear insinuating creature that I

couldn't refuse you, if you asked me to live a week in the Seven Dials."

A shade passed over the lady's face. "What did the old man say?" she asked.

"Egad!" cried the baronet, "he was so astonished that he said nothing at first. He cried like a child, and then kissed a lot of little dirty imps that came running in to his call from all the surrounding gutters. You told me on no account to say whence the money and things came, and so he called me an angel sent by a saint of heaven, or a saint sent by an angel, I forget which. Faith! if I'm a saint, I'm the first Luckless that was ever canonised. But you are an angel, you know, and I expect some night or other to see you fly right away, to that old rascal Methusalem's astonishment, through the ceiling of the theatre, leaving nothing but unpaid milliners bills and broken hearts behind you."

"I'll have you to know, sir, that I don't owe a milliner's bill in London. What do you mean?"

"Then," quoth Sir Harry, "they give longer credit in Paris than I fancied, that's all."

"Bless the man! I don't believe he ever paid ready money for anything in his life," said the lady; "unless, indeed, it might be a tavern dinner or a turnpike. But, tell me, did you not feel happier for the good you did, and the enjoyment you bestowed on that old man and those poor children? Did you not feel that you had done something in this world better than winning a match at billiards, or a bet on the Derby?"

"Well, upon my word," said Sir Harry, "I did feel a kind of satisfaction as I came away; and I really think if I had the money, I should like to do that sort of thing, now and then, you know. I never saw an old fellow in such ecstasies for a 'fiver.'"

"Five pounds! You did not give him five? I only told you two," she said.

"Well," said Sir Harry, "didn't you? I forgot. But I hadn't change, and, upon my word, I thought if you gave something, I might as well do the same, you know. I was deucedly lucky the other day—won fifty on Charity."

"Then I've half a mind not to pay my two pounds," rejoined the actress. "Here they are, however. Nay, I insist; and what is more, I shall not make you my almoner again, if you do such extravagant things. Look after your own poor people, sir, and don't interfere with mine. I've half a mind to be very angry with you."

"You are the oddest girl in the world, and I don't care where the other comes from," observed Sir Harry, twirling his moustache. "But what could a fellow do, if you will send him to such places? It's all very well for Mademoiselle Floret to tell you of them, but you should just see once for yourself."

"Did you see to the fresh groundsel for the birds?" asked the deity of the Thespis, quite suddenly.

"The people in Covent Garden will send an old man whom they know, regularly. Now, there's a fancy! As if your servants couldn't get it any hour in the streets."

"Oh! if you think so much of the trouble, I won't ask you another time. I tell you I'm very fond of my birds. When I was a poor girl, I would walk miles on a Sunday to fetch something green for my feathered prisoner, to whom I could not afford a comfortable cage."

"That was when you were at school, I suppose?" asked Sir Harry.

"At school! yes, at school with a very stern mistress. We did not have too much to eat, I can tell you," was the remark of the actress.

"You had an excellent French master, at any rate," said Luckless. "Count Adolphe de Mareuse tells me that your accent is perfect."

"Oh!" she said, with a little laugh, "I learnt that entirely at a finishing school. I was speaking of my early days."

"What was the name of the place where you were treated so badly; was it an old-fashioned establishment?"

"Very," she replied, answering the last question first. "We called it the Rookery."

"In Yorkshire?"

"No! no! in Middlesex. But come," she added, "I hate talking of my school-days. You have done pretty well, sir, and may stay half an hour longer, and talk with me, before the bears and monkeys are out. My animals of the Zoological Gardens come to see me, instead of my going to visit them, except on Sundays, you know, when an especial ticket is required."

Let us change the style of our dialogue. As we have not introduced the lady by name, we will call them, after a late example, Lui et Elle.

LUI. And pray, what animal am I?

ELLE. Oh, you? None at all; a sort of Irish stag-hound, only they don't fetch and carry, you know.

LUI. I suppose I must take that for a compliment.

ELLE. I should think so, indeed. You should hear what some of them are in my catalogue.

LUI. Tell me.

ELLE. Not now. Let's think of anything else. Tell me some news.

LUI. Well, the whole town is ringing with your exploits; but you know that.

ELLE. The town is easily astonished.

LUI. You are more and more the rage, I can assure you. Royalty itself does not name a larger medley of articles—hats, cloaks, boots, carriages, and harness, parasols, driving-whips, toast-racks, soap and perfumery, jackets, crimping machines for the hair, crinolines, cotelettes—they are all called by your name. And there is a new photographic portrait out every morning.

ELLE. Have you seen that one of me on the white Arab?

LUI. I should rather think I have. It is as *répandu* as "Mappin Brothers," which nearly drives me distracted, in the Hansom cabs. But how do you manage so many escapades in a week?

ELLE. Why, my dear friend, only one-half has any foundation in truth, as you must know, and that

half is pretty sufficiently embroidered, and then I never contradict the *on dits*.

LUI. You would have enough to do, though I'm not sure if people wouldn't believe them all the more readily.

ELLE. When I read in the "Court Twaddler," that I horsewhipped a coal-heaver and a brace of noblemen, broke a bank at Baden, passed myself off as a bishop's daughter, and ended by throwing a Jew millionaire out of the window—what does it matter? That moral humbug, the Public, is by turns shocked and amused, and the daughters of propriety and decorum wear their dresses higher or lower, and trim their dresses according to any whim and fancy, with greater zeal and industry than ever. I think of coming out as a Quakeress next, and I will wager a dinner at Richmond, that half a score of duchesses, fifty peeresses, and commoners without end, will appear in drab and poke bonnets within a week.

LUI. Ha! ha! why don't you ally yourself with the wholesale houses in the City, and get five per cent. on the profits of every new fashion?

ELLE. Such a suggestion is worthy of Manchester.

LUI. Positively you are a wonder—the marvel of the age. Oh! if you were only——

ELLE. What?

LUI. (*Confused*). Nothing, nothing, I assure you. I don't know what I was about to say.

ELLE. Don't be mean, Sir Harry; speak the truth. I know what you would have said.

LUI. I meant as careful of your reputation, as you are fascinating.

ELLE. What then?

LUI. You might marry any one you pleased.

ELLE. (*With flashing eyes*). Listen! Had any one else dared to insinuate what you so nearly said just now, I would have served him as I am reputed to have done the Jew millionaire. Do you think I *can't* marry whom I please? Do you think reputation, as you call it, necessary to enable a woman like me to marry? Why, it is just *my* reputation, such as it is, that I should marry on. I am supposed to be a Siren, who ruins fools. And yet my secrets and my sins are only known to myself. Society furnishes me even with vices out of its decorous imagination. Ha! ha! And do you think I could not make one fool the more, if I pleased? And suppose, sir, for the sake of argument, that I am not virtuous? Suppose that I despise virtue? Why do these prim gentlewomen imitate me? Why is vice, as you are pleased to call it—yes, you, reckless libertine as you are—their study and their model? I tell you that I only know and recognise virtue as the selfish institution of you men, whose very contact ought to be spurned by true innocence. I only know it, I say, by the awkward imitation of my follies, and by the cant and uncharitableness that it evokes.

LUI. Don't be so vehement: one would think you were acting something.

ELLE. Virtue! Yes, in forced marriages and prudential motives. Suppose I were to speak, as many a girl in my position doubtless could. Suppose I said to you, "Man, I never was virtuous. I never knew virtue, never saw it, never felt it. It was not

in the workhouse where I was born, possibly of a 'noble' father and an erring mother. It was not in my academy of the gutter, or the low lodging-houses where I was dragged up. It was not in the bricklayer's field, where I first listened to the voice of a rustic betrayer. Ha! ha! Not in the gaol to which I was once consigned, ignorant at least of the imputed offence which sent me thither. What do I owe virtue? Plenty of cheap tracts, and a Bible, which I could not even pawn; but not bread, nor care, nor clothes, not love, nor Christian sympathy, nor a home." How dare you talk to me of virtue, wretched libertine that you are? Away! Do not pollute the air with your false breath prating to me of virtue, I say.

LUI. I did not say a word about it. Pray, are you coming out as a tragédienne? Is this out of a new sensation play? What a strange, funny girl you are!

ELLE. Yes, yes! Old Methusalem of the Thespis declares that melodrama is my forte. I thought I would give you a specimen of my powers. *Changeons tout celà*. Has my Lord Cheltenham given up his little Agapemone in the Grove of the Evangelist, since he took the chair at the anniversary dinner of the Society for the Promotion of Morality among the Feejees?

LUI. Come, come. There is one thing quite sure. You have much more good in you than you like to own. Don't pretend any wickedness to me. I don't believe in it. My opinion is that you are the best and noblest little creature in the world. And talking

of that, I want especially to appeal to your better nature. Do you know you are doing sad mischief in a certain quarter?

ELLE. I should rather think I am, in a good many. To destroy the peace of families is the reparation I ask for giving my inventive faculties such constant exercise. Look at this! (*Puts on a flower-pot hat.*) Is this a stroke of genius?

LUI. Most bewitchingly frightful, indeed. Rotten Row will look as if its fair visitants had made a razzia on the Botanical Gardens, and robbed their exotic beauties of their temporary dwelling-places, the earthen pots. It only wants a green veil and a hole in the top for ventilation. Why the women's brains will actually sprout. But do be quiet for one moment. You know Arthur Aubrey?

ELLE. Know him? I promised to drive his horses in the Park this very afternoon; but he shows such desperate eagerness to keep his appointments that I invariably break mine.

LUI. Well, now. I want you to cut him altogether.

ELLE. Upon my word, sir. Ha! ha! If you are coming out in the jealous line, I shall positively be denied to you altogether.

LUI. Nonsense! Listen. This man, who is acting so absurd a part, has an angel for his wife. If she hears of his running after you it will break her heart.

ELLE. Break *what*?

LUI. Her heart, I said.

ELLE. More idiot she. Why, the man follows me like a shadow.

LUI. Call her what you please; you do not, cannot

think it. And though I may provoke your laughter, I will appeal to your friendship for myself. I love her myself.

ELLE. YOU? (*With darkening face and apart to herself.*) And he tells me this!

LUI. With a love of which you can form no possible conception.

ELLE. Of which I can form no possible conception! (*With a small shrill laugh.*) Of course not. How should I? Except on the stage, you know. Well, so you want me to lure this person's husband more completely into my toils? Well, well, for so great a friend as you are, Harry, I will do it.

LUI. No! no! You mistake me utterly. I want you, on the contrary, to decline his lightest attentions, to repel him with scorn, never to suffer him to speak to you again. But do not, I implore you, mistake me. Were he dead, she could never be mine; never belong to any one save to the man who is so utterly unworthy of her, and who now follows you with such desperate infatuation.

ELLE. What bad taste! To desert this paragon, and to follow me. Don't you wonder at his choice? But I say, Harry, what fun! Only fancy you sentimentally in love. What confidence you must have in my honour and principle, to feel assured. I shall not tell such an excellent joke to all our acquaintance.

LUI. Do you know that accomplished, exquisitely beautiful as she is, this deserted wife, is blind? Yes, within this last few weeks, that calamity has overtaken her. She weeps at home in darkness.

ELLE. There, there, that will do. Am I to keep virtuous folks straight? Am I to restore married couples to their duty, and snivel out, "Bless you, be happy!" What is this Mrs. Aubrey to me? As for him, all I know is that I dislike the fellow, and that he bores me. It seems that he is a mean, heartless scamp. I suppose, therefore, that I ought to love him. But I have no power to send him to the penitentiary, or what might be worse, to the loving arms of his precious wife. And what claim has she on me? Would she move her little finger to save me from the grave, or worse? Besides, you silly fellow, do you think he would not find some one else to make love to, if I declined his precious homage? I tell you I hate her, I hate him, I hate you, and all your selfish sex.

LUI. Now do be quiet, there's a dear good girl.

ELLE. I will trouble you to ring the bell. I want my lunch. I am not like these artificial minxes who gormandise in their bed-chambers, and can eat no dinner, poor things! I am as hungry as a hunter. (*Aside.*) I thought if there was any one in the world whom he loved it was myself. (*Sighs.*) But no matter! (*Aloud.*) You are spoony on a blind woman, are you? You shall take me to the Park, and point her out. She can't see us, you know.

LUI. (*Shaking his head.*) She is never there. Don't be a monster, Kitty!

ELLE. I am determined to see her somehow; and when I am determined, you know—— By-the-bye, is this your forty-ninth or fiftieth pure attachment, Harry? (*Dancing a few steps and humming a popular*

air.) Do you know what Madame Claudine says of my dancing? Oh! I wanted to tell you of my answer to that odious young wretch, Master Robert Dupe Postobit. Because, forsooth, I am on the stage, he thought he might insult me by the offer of an "establishment," as it is called; whereupon he came here, the ignorant, impudent young monkey, and laid his heart and fortune at my feet. I was considering what I should do—whether I should horsewhip him myself or not—when he wound up by saying that he is very short of ready money just now; but will have twenty thousand pounds a-year when his old dad, Sir Robert, is turfed; an event which he strongly suggested would come off very speedily. This gave me the cue. I heard him out with the most polite attention, and then rang the bell. "Floret," said I, "show the young gentleman to the door, and mind you don't admit him again, until his father dies."

LUI. I heard, in addition, that you threw his hat out of the window.

ELLE. The inventive faculties of Society are decidedly slow.

Here the pair were interrupted by the entrance of Floret, who announced "Mr. Aubrey."

"It's the gentleman," she said, "who has called so many times lately, and he says that you expect him by appointment."

"Do I, indeed?" said her mistress. "Then I suppose he must come in. Oh! pray, don't go away, Sir Harry. We have no secrets."

"I don't know whether you have or not," was the

somewhat sullen reply ; “but I can’t endure the fellow, and wish to go.”

“Stay five minutes, I tell you,” said the actress. “Here, Floret, tell Lacy to come in shortly. My sheep-dog, you know. Her attendance is a homage which I pay to propriety, in return for the many which propriety bestows on me, you observe.”

“Incorrigible girl !” said Sir Harry, after a pause, when Floret had left the room. “I cannot think you are in earnest, after what I have told you.”

“Indeed ! Then you shall see,” was the lady’s rejoinder, as Floret re-entered and announced Mr. Arthur Aubrey.

Sir Harry took up his hat, and bit his lip in silence.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO SHE WAS.

Elle était de ce monde.

MALESHERBES.

She was no girl, round whose young life had shone
The vestal halo of a cherished name:
No father prayed to God to look on her;
No mother smoothed her hair; no brother fired
With pride to hear her praised; no pious priest
Came near to bless her.

“In curses was I reared
As in a turgid atmosphere of flame.
Threats, blows, and kicks were all my heritage;
Rain soaked my scanty crusts. A stepmother
Plucked back my infant soul, when 'twould have soared
Tow'ards the bright strip of blue which sometimes roofed
Even our dingy court;—her name was WANT;
Grim, scolding, tattered beldam; leprous hag.
And ask you how I felt? I tell you that
She would have soiled a wilderness of doves,
Could she have breathed on them.”

WHO and what was this *débutante* on the boards
of the Thespis, this Siren who entranced the *jeunesse*
and the *vieillesse dorée* of London with her follies and
fascinations, her feats of horsemanship and reck-
less escapades? Who was this creature of the demi-
monde, who set fashions to peeresses and their

daughters, whom duchesses sought to imitate, and whose mode of dress and even deportment panting Respectability laboured always at a respectable distance to attain? We can only impart such knowledge, as a random collection of *on dits* and anecdotes picked up at the Clubs and across the railings in Hyde Park, enables us to furnish. She was known to the world as Kitty Dareall; and her appearance driving a pair of thoroughbreds in the Park, first attracted attention, rather less than a year before the period we introduced our readers to her in the last chapter. Since then her career had been brilliant and wonderful, rapid as the pace of her coursers, meteoric as the gleam of her tresses floating in the wind, as she dashed past the admiring crowd of men, not women, who were loud in her praises; for her own sex copied, but did not praise or admire her. It was known that she had been *en pension* at a somewhat expensive seminary in Paris, and that she had some aristocratic friends during the eighteen months or thereabouts which she passed there, including two or three ladies of high rank.

The eccentric Mrs. Grewsome, wife of the great Latin historian and M.P., was wont to patronise her, and took Sir Bullfrog Leapfrog there, to admire the progress she made. He was profuse in his admiration of her small classical head; and would soon have exhausted all the capital letters in a moderately-sized printing establishment, had it been called on suddenly to set up in type the expressions of his extravagant encomia. Then there was the strong-minded but good and pure-hearted Lady Tredarno, who called

her a "gifted being," and an "intellectual marvel." "Full of feeling and talent," she would say, "and so natural. Quite a study, my dear."

Once, and once only, when our young friend had been in Paris some ten months, a lady and gentleman called, who evidently took a great interest in her fate. They had just arrived from the West Indies, and the gentleman seemed deeply suffering from ill health. He appeared in the capacity of her guardian. Young, noble, and amiable, this couple seemed to lavish on her every attention, which was met with an earnest respect and dutiful homage by the mysterious young stranger, who evidently entertained towards them the strongest sentiments of veneration and love. After a few weeks, however, the young lord and his wife—for such was their rank—returned to England; thence, as it was said, to sail again for the West Indian colony, of which he was governor. They wrote every week; and then at last there came a pause, and then a letter with a black seal, and an enclosure, not from him or from her. They and their infant child had died within a week; he of consumption, and the wife of fatigue and fever consequent upon watching and grief. The young lady at the seminary assumed a garb of the deepest mourning, which did not belie her feelings and her heart. She mourned over their loss intensely for a short time, and then suddenly her whole demeanour changed. She who had been so gentle and retiring became brusque, reckless, and undisciplined in her manner and behaviour. She seemed as if she had suddenly thrown off a mask of piety and decorum, and was careless of opinion or

remark. Though, in one sense, her conduct was irreproachable, as she did not give the slightest cause for scandal with any one of the opposite sex ; yet she not only utterly disregarded her religious duties and observances, to which she had been wedded before, but seemed to lose, together with faith and hope, all care for worldly approbation or censure. Cold and reserved as she had previously been, she now grew flighty and talkative. A sort of perilous desperation seemed to have seized upon her. Both teachers and pupils were amazed at the change which came over the reserved and silent English girl. Her masters of music and dancing, who had before only noted her amazing progress, and set it down to her studious habits as well as natural genius, were now perfectly amazed by the airs which she assumed.

Amongst other things, since the death of her beloved guardian and his wife, she took the utmost interest in theatrical matters. About ten months more passed thus, when she suddenly announced her determination to leave and proceed to England. As no one appeared to exercise any control over her, there was no opposition offered. The music-master made her a declaration of love, and the dancing-master offered her his hand and name. She laughed at both alike. From the remittances she received, she paid the amount which she was indebted to the mistress of the seminary, and took her departure alone, deeply regretted by some, an object of hatred to others, and of wonder and speculation to all.

Who was this young girl, thus launched upon the world alone ; so self-possessed and confident, so deli-

cate in appearance and yet so strong, so shadowed by grief and yet so gay and almost defiant in manner? It was an enigma which none there could solve. The young Englishwoman had made no bosom friends, no confidantes, at the finishing institution at Le Valois, Paris. When she arrived there, no one could make her out at all. She had more the air of a nun who had passed through her novitiate, than of a young parlour-boarder who had still to make her way in the world. Her progress in mental culture was, as we have intimated, something marvellous. But the oddest part was that in the short time she spent there, she seemed to grow so much younger that it fairly puzzled them all. She evidently thrived on the new diet and climate, and to the most remarkable extent. Instead of making her pale, constant study seemed to impart bloom to her cheek. M. Théophile Maillard, the handsome young drawing-master, from whom she did not take lessons, declared that she devoured the roses in the garden, where she used to walk for hours intent upon her books. Being a lady-killer, he once ventured to slip a billet into her hand. She took it, and read it, and said :

“ But what is this, then, sir? I have no maid-servant; if I had, I scarcely know if I could permit the addresses of a bad subject. As it is, I shall not be very angry at a jest this one time.”

And she returned his scented billet with a low, mocking *révérence*, which nearly drove M. Théophile to a supper at the Maison d'Or, regardless of expense, and “ charcoal for one ” afterwards.

But what was the mystery of this young person ?

Why was the almost religious enthusiast, the amateur nun of the establishment, transformed into a creature of wayward worldliness and wild *insouciance* thus suddenly, on the death of those to whom she was apparently so ardently attached? It was as if with their funeral obsequies, the tragedy of her life had ended and its comedy begun. We do not speak of the first month or six weeks of absolute prostration and sorrow. But was this real? Or was she a demure sinner, a sly hypocrite suddenly emancipated from thralldom by their unexpected demise?

Let us follow her to the solitude of her chamber; let us hear what she says at night to herself, as she sits looking vacantly into the past, or questions herself of the present and future. She has evidently lost some great end and object of existence. She is like a vessel adrift, dragging her anchor and nearing a mighty quicksand.

"They are dead and gone," she cried; "for whose sakes I believed in all—the justice of Providence and the goodness of mankind. What have I to live for now? They have perished in their beautiful youth; he so noble, so calm, so brave, and generous; she so lovely and devoted to him. Even their little child too. All are gone. There is no trace left of them in this world. What should I do, who only lived through and for them, whose sole recompense was in their smiles of approval, whose sole encouragement was in their kind and sympathetic words? I should go mad, if I were to live this dull life of discipline long, without object or reward. Nor have I the

means. Sainted angels! look down and forgive me; for I was not worthy of your care!"

Then she would weep, but not pray, as had been her wont; and sit thinking far into the night, until her brain was nearly crazed with conflicting thoughts and emotions. Gradually, however, these wailings of a tortured spirit became less frequent; and more worldly longings and fancies re-entered and took possession of her soul. She became, if possible, more than ever devoted to her studies.

"I have but a short time to remain," she mused; "my money will but barely last out till midsummer here, and then give me a fair start in London, say of a twelvemonth, to obtain a footing on the stage—yes, that must be my career. Mrs. Grewsome and Lady Tredarno will assist me, I know. I must never be poor again. No, I would rather die than endure that horrible, that loathsome poverty! I could not now. I wonder what would have been my fate, had my benefactors lived. But I never seemed to think or to care, whilst they were alive: I only cared to satisfy them. And now I am alone, utterly alone. But I will triumph; I will be rich and powerful. Pardon me, ye bright angels!" (And she would fling open her window and lean out; gazing on the glittering heraldry of Time, as if the stars were interested parties in the troubled repentance or resolve of every murky little human brain.) "Pardon me, you know what I was and am! For you, I would have been anything that you wished or thought fit. But you are gone, and what does it matter now?"

You will never smile on me any more ; never reward me with even a look. Heaven knows how little worthy I ever was of your pains. But I would have laid down my worthless life for yours, could I have done so, and shown at least that the poor girl whom you rescued from want was not ungrateful. I would die now, if I knew it would please you ; but forgive me if I seek to fight the world again with its own weapons. Some day, for your sakes, I may do some good action, who knows ? I may help some miserable creatures, if I become rich. ‘Rich !’ yes, that is it. Sir Bullfrog said that I was born for the stage ; and he is a great man. And Mrs. Grewsome, too, she has great influence. In my sleep last night, I dreamt I was poor again. I thought a lank and ghastly Form seized me, and shrieked in my ears, ‘I am WANT, and I come to claim my prey. You are mine !’ I thought he dragged me through filthy streets and alleys into a dreadful house with broken windows ; for all the world like those in the corner of Stamford-street, in the Blackfriars-road. Up a dusty staircase with cobwebs that clung round me like bits of floating crape hanging from the ceilings and walls, into a squalid garret with a pallet bed and a broken chair, where he left me shivering with cold and fright, until I awoke screaming aloud, ‘Want ! Want !’ It was once no dream. Anything, anything, save that ! I dare not, will not be poor again. I have money enough to maintain me, until I can carry out my plans. If I fail, I will die ; but never be poor again !”

A few months after, a young lady, richly but ele-

gantly attired, took her departure in the Boulogne packet for Folkestone. Strangely enough, there was no less a personage on board than the great Methusalem Wigster, on his return from Paris to his theatrical duties, with two or three of the latest and most successful French dramas duly adapted for the English stage in his portmanteau, a cigar in his mouth, a glass of brandy-and-water in his hand, and mighty thoughts revolving in his brain, as to the precise amount of indecency, immorality, and blasphemy, that a British audience would not only stand, but applaud, and the exact shape in which it should be administered. As the shores of France receded, an occasional grin intensified the perpetual smile which he wore off the stage, as naturally as, and even more constantly than, his wig or false teeth, since we believe that he left off these to sleep. He was thinking of his forthcoming announcement in large posters of "La Dame Potiphar," a piece which had just created a great sensation in the French capital. In this drama the character of Joseph assumed a completely novel and French complexion. He was not only guilty, as any co-respondent of the Divorce Court need be; but he cherished a sublime affection for Pharaoh's only daughter. It was to conceal the evidence of her mother's guilt that he sacrificed the chief butler of his royal master. "La Dame Potiphar" turned out a great success; while the astute Methusalem duly at times, when returning thanks at a dramatic dinner, or making a beautiful speech about almshouses for decayed actors, lamented the decline of the British drama with a vicious twinkle

in either optic, which was delightful to observe. There, however, he was, like a jolly old dramatic bagman chuckling over the proceeds of a successful trip, with "La Dame Potiphar" in his valise, cheaply translated by a dramatic (!) newspaper critic, and a charming piece besides, ready cut and dried, in which a heroic brother sacrifices the reputation of his sister in order to save the credit of his adored one with her rich husband. She has a husband, of course, or it would not do for a moral audience.

Before the packet reached Folkestone, our adventuress—for such we must call her—made such an impression upon Methusalem, that he actually promised her an engagement on their arrival in town. It was found, however, necessary, that she should devote at least a year to study; for which purpose she took apartments in Soho-square, which soon became the scene of fashionable réunions, where the number of gentlemen greatly predominated over that of ladies. For a time Mrs. Grewsome and Lady Tredarno continued to patronise the young actress, and the former actually planned a match or two for her intellectual wonder; one with a middle-aged baronet, and the other with a rising barrister in the Temple. If these matches fell through, it was not in either instance the gentleman's fault. This greatly annoyed Mrs. Grewsome, who ceased to visit her protégée; and in turn Lady Tredarno found that her "strange girl" was becoming far too conspicuous and too fast. No one could breathe a word of actual slander, and probably there was no reason for it. Sir Harry Luckless was the only gentleman visitor

admitted to anything like familiarity. But the "world" could not explain how an actress *in posse* could have horses, and equipages, and jewellery, and an apparently inexhaustible wardrobe. So her female acquaintances were confined to third and fourth rate actresses, and the companionship of her "sheep dog," as she called her, the discreet Lacy, a gentlewoman who was said to be the widow of an officer, and she was too, and of a sheriff to boot, i.e., a sheriff's officer, who left her a very small income and an "honourable" name. Gradually, Miss Dareall's vivacity outstepped all bounds of decorum; she became the most celebrated, or at least notorious, demirep in the metropolis. But let it, again and again, be fully understood that no one had any positive charge to make against her conduct. A very Diana in the chase, it must be owned that she did not merit a reputation quite as spotless as that of the goddess. She courted and defied calumny; and not a woman in London but was ready to return a verdict of guilty against her, and to state cases without end. Only a few men, and these among the most profligate on town, recorded their belief in her innocence. Mr. Stingray declared that she lived on the testimonials to virtue volunteered by her eager crowd of rich and aristocratic admirers. Certain it is, that any wealthy old, or young fellow, was only too proud to be her banker. Noblemen and commoners vied with each other in their anxiety to anticipate her most extravagant fancies, and execute her costliest commissions. It was generally considered that, as soon as she had been a sufficient time on the stage to

be married from it, she intended to make a brilliant alliance and enter the ranks of the ennobled actresses of England. There is no doubt that she need not have waited for this. Had her actions been flagrantly immoral, it would scarcely have diminished her chance of "marrying well." A Criminal Court and an accusation of murder have furnished an interesting young lady prisoner with an excellent matrimonial advertisement, ere now. The wonderful assurance and exploits of Miss Kate Darrell, which caused her to be called "Kitty Dareall," her dress, her style, her racy "sayings and doings," including some repartees and practical jokes which convulsed all London with laughter; the new fashions which she set, and the old which she put down, with imperious, if not imperial, authority, rendered the sketch which Sir Harry Luckless submitted to her own view, and which we recorded in the previous chapter of this eventful history, by no means either a caricature or an exaggeration.

And is it possible that this being, gifted as she undoubtedly was for good or for evil, could, within the short space of three years, have risen from the lowest depths of human degradation to her questionable pre-eminence? All that we can say is, that it was not only possible, but true. Nor does the case stand by any means alone. We know of a more recent one at this moment, which strikingly resembles in many of its details that which we have endeavoured to narrate in these pages.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DUCAL PHILANTHROPIST.

Never since "the year one" of modern fashionable life was such an audience gathered in the pit of this elegant little Parisian theatre. Duke shouldered marquis, and ambassadors trod on the toes of royal and imperial princes. The lovely débutante appeared as Danæe, in the "Proverbe" of Alphonse de Crapaudet, "Père qui perd et fille qui file," since adapted by one of our most popular burlesque writers, and about to be produced at the Theatre Royal St. Holywell, under the title of "A Crisis in the Affairs of Acrisius." Her costume nearly approached that of Innocence itself. The Duke of * * * offered fifty thousand francs the next day for the satin boots she wore on the occasion.—*From the Fashionable Intelligence (for British wives and daughters) of the "Court Twaddler."*

WE left Miss Dareall and Sir Harry Luckless expecting the entrance of Mr. Aubrey. That gentleman and Mrs. Lacy very speedily made their appearance.

"Ah, dear Mr. Aubrey," said Miss Dareall; "I'm so delighted to see you. You called before, I think; both yesterday and the day before?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, between whom and Sir Harry a very stiff salute had passed, "I have called several times, but not been fortunate enough to find you; you are so very much occupied with your various engagements."

"I am very busy indeed," she said. "I have to attend a rehearsal every other day now."

"Indeed! And what, may I ask, is the name of the new piece?" inquired Aubrey. "I presume it is a burlesque?"

"Yes," answered the actress. "It is called 'Fayre Rosamond.'"

"I need not ask what part you take," said Aubrey.

"Oh! I am the charming favourite, of course," she replied. "The scene is laid at Rosherville Gardens, and I am poisoned with South African sherry, after a pas de deux with Queen Eleanor, and an egg-dance to myself. If I don't break an egg, my jealous rival agrees to spare my life, on condition that I am apprenticed to a religious sewing-machine establishment at Haggerstone, and consent to leave off crinoline and cut off my back hair. A wily page in the King's service boils the eggs hard, and I am on the point of embracing the alternative, when the Queen unluckily takes it into her head to make some egg-flip on the spot, and discovers the ruse. Furious at the discovery, she rushes at me with a carving-knife and a wine-glass of the dreadful mixture. I drink it, and sink insensible on the stage, as the King comes in disguised as a market-gardener. There is a grand *pas d'éclaircissement*, during which I recover, join in a Scotch reel, and the King proposes to abdicate, and that all three should emigrate to Utah. An exquisite scene of the valley of the Great Salt Lake succeeds. The forty wives of Brigham Young are discovered wheeling forty double perambulators, with an advertisement of

an establishment for the sale of those street nuisances in Soho-square. The perambulators are all doubled up, and turn into models of Chinese baby-towers, and a general dance of the whole *corps de ballet* concludes the piece. What do you think of that? Isn't it charming?"

"Very," said Aubrey, dryly. "I know not whether to admire most, the good taste or sense of such a performance. I believe a burlesque writer of the present day would parody the Massacre of St. Bartholomew or the Crucifixion itself, or even that of the Innocents."

"Have you seen the opera of the 'Flood,' by the great French composer, what's his name?" asked Sir Harry. "Shem's wife has a lover, who follows the slow-sailing ark by means of a swimming-belt, and is hidden in the hold. He finally escapes in the disguise of a male ape whom he killed on board, and so lost a whole branch of the great Simian family to the world."

"Not I," said Miss Dareall. "I am told that there is a wonderful rain effect produced in the overture by pouring sackfuls of dry peas on the big drum. The first scene is an umbrella dance; is it not?"

Sir Harry nodded assent. "Then," he continued, "there is a comic under-writer of a sort of antediluvian Lloyd's, limited—a bubble Company, of course—who is found in the fork of a hollow fir-tree on Ararat, and who duns Noah for a heavy amount. The ark encounters a yacht from Babylon, and a heavy swell describes the whole thing as a smartish shower. Ham lays down the principle of negro emancipation in a

duet with his mother, and the rest of the *dramatis personæ* are made up of a kind of nautical mythology, consisting of Neptune, the Tritons and Nereids, the Sea-serpent, and a French Davy Jones, who is a cross between a Breton boatswain and a marine Devil on two Sticks."

"I don't know what we are coming to," said Aubrey; "but, upon my word, I should think the stage before the Flood, if there were any, must have greatly resembled our present style of dramatic and operatic productions. But how does the author account for a full *corps de ballet* on board of the ark?"

"Well, considering that there is one on board of the Spanish Armada in a late popular production, I don't see much harm in that," observed Miss Dareall. "Perhaps they were all drowned afterwards, or caught cold and died of consumption before the world was properly aired again."

"Have you got the greys or the bays, or whatever they are, at the door, Mr. Aubrey?" she continued, after a slight pause.

"The chesnuds," answered Aubrey, with some little hesitation, before Luckless. "Yes, they are at your service."

"I will not be a minute getting ready," said the lady.

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Lacy. "Have you forgotten, dear, that you told the duke to call at three to take you to the Horticultural?"

"I have changed my mind," was the answer; "and now I'm going to change my dress, which is much

more important. I shall not be a minute getting ready."

And she ran out of the room, followed by Lacy.

"May I ask after the health of Mrs. Aubrey?" inquired Sir Harry of his companion, so soon as they were alone together.

"Oh! yes, very well, thank you; that is, not very well, I mean. You know what a terrible calamity, poor thing! so sad for me. I am forced, you know, to seek a little relief, a little distraction, and that sort of thing. Very sad, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Sir Harry; "so I have been telling Miss Dareall. Confound the rascal!" he muttered between his teeth, "I would shoot him, if that were any use. Yes (*aloud*), I said your generous devotion was wearing you out. (*Aside.*) Selfish scoundrel! (*Aloud.*) Certainly a man who could neglect such a woman under such circumstances must be a brute indeed!"

"Sir!" began Aubrey.

"Ah!" broke in the other, "I see you feel the same indignation that I do at the bare thought of it. How different is your conduct! Forced to seek relief from your incessant care and sedulous watch over one so beautiful and amiable visited by such a calamity! You are indeed a wonder, a very phoenix. I trust, sir, that you may meet with your desert."

"Does he dare?" said Aubrey to himself. (*Aloud.*) "What do you mean, may I ask? I do not quite understand."

"Mean?" was the reply—"mean? Why, that Mrs. Aubrey may not remain blind. What should I

mean? What would any one wish who knew her and you?"

"Sir," said Aubrey, colouring deeply, "if you intend——"

At this moment they were interrupted by Kitty, attired in a rich, plain black velvet dress, which set off her slender form to the utmost advantage. A row of gold buttons of a classical design, from Etruscan models, just sent over by Castellani of Rome, ornamented the dress, beginning small at the throat and gradually increasing in size, till the lowest on the border of her skirt was as large as a crown-piece. A hat of minx-fur, with a single eagle's feather fastened by a coral aigrette, completed her toilet, which was certainly of a most piquant description.

"Show me a woman in Society," she said, "who can dress thus in the time. Novel wager! The celebrated Kitty Dareall, *née* Martha Grub, will dress against any woman, catch-weights, for a thousand pounds. As, of course, it would be the fashion to imitate me, I should be presented with a testimonial by husbands. A votre disposition, monsieur," she added, giving her arm to Aubrey. "Bye, bye, Luckless!"

"Stop, dear!" interposed Lacy. "Whatever shall I say to the Duke of Chalkstoneville? There is the doublest of knocks at the door."

"Come out this way, Mr. Aubrey," said Miss Dareall, running to another door. "Tell the duke to smother himself in his strawberry-leaves, or hang himself with his own garter."

And she ran out laughing, followed by Aubrey;

but leaving Sir Harry Luckless, who had not time to make his exit before the door opened, and the duke appeared, ear-trumpet in hand.

"Ah, Sir Harry Luckless, you here?" said his grace. "Where is our fair friend? Where is she? Where is the charming Kitty?"

Here he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which gave Mrs. Lacy time to implore Sir Harry, in a whisper, not to contradict her.

"Oh dear!" said the duke. "It's nothing but the dust in the streets. I never was better in my life." And he coughed again so violently that he grew purple in the face, and Sir Harry good-naturedly assisted him to a chair. "Oh dear!" he resumed; "I beg pardon, I declare. Tell Miss Dareall that I have kept my word, although I had to quit the levée early on purpose. Ask her to come down directly, if she can. I have brought the diamonds and the vouchers for the ball, which she was so anxious about."

"Indeed, your grace!" said Lacy, curtsying; "Miss Dareall will be delighted, I am sure."

Upon which the faithful attendant received a jewel-case and a sealed envelope from the duke, and left the room.

"Plague on it!" said the duke to Sir Harry, who was an amused spectator of the whole proceeding, "I wish she would be content with diamonds without vouchers. Between ourselves, I shall get into a scrape some day; I know I shall. I don't mind telling you, but I am sadly afraid this may reach the ears of—— Eh? But I am too useful to the Go-

vernment and too much courted by the Opposition to feel much alarm. Oh dear! Oh! this cough."

"Indeed, duke," said Sir Harry—who was a great favourite with many exalted personages who could appreciate his really gentlemanly though libertine qualities—"indeed, I am aware you can do almost anything. Look at that affair of the review at Bump-kingham and the postmaster's two daughters."

"Ah," quoth his grace, whose deafness often caused him to reply *à tort et à travers*, "so you've read my speech in the 'Morning Post,' have you? I am told that Wilberforce and the rest of them are delighted with it."

Here Mrs. Lacy re-entered.

"Your grace," she said, with the deepest reverence, "I was not aware that Miss Dareall had gone out. She left her kindest regards with her maid, and she waited until past three; and as she thought your grace would be detained by your official duties, she is gone to see a lady friend, who is very ill, at Barnet, and she will see your grace to-morrow, or any day your grace is pleased to appoint, at two o'clock; she will be *so* sorry when she knows your grace has done her the honour of this visit."

"Did she leave no message for me?" inquired Sir Harry, who could scarcely control his inclination to laugh outright.

"La, Sir Harry!" answered Lacy, with a slight dip, "to be sure she did. She said if you would be kind enough to look at poor Fido, who has eaten nothing since yesterday afternoon, and see to him,

she should be so much obliged, and you can look in again as soon as ever you please."

The Duke of Chalkstoneville, who did not fail to catch the sense of the duenna's shrill tones through his ear-trumpet, seemed at first somewhat puzzled, and not a little angry; but being very good-natured in his way, especially where ladies were concerned, his anger, as Mrs. Lacy well knew, was not likely to be very durable.

"Confound it, madam!" he began; "why she knew I was going to Bumpkinghamshire this very evening. To-morrow," he continued, addressing Sir Harry, "is the great agricultural dinner; and I have to give the first prize, consisting of a smock-frock and a guinea, to the labourer who has set the best example for morality for sixty years out of three parishes. My dear madam, will you kindly return those vouchers to me. I would rather present them myself. You can give her the diamonds, of course. At any rate I shall get out of that scrape. Eh? eh? what do you think?"

His grace was, after so prolonged a speech, seized with such a violent fit of coughing, that at one time it seemed as if Bumpkinghamshire would lose one of its noblest pillars of morality, so shaky did the ducal rewarder of virtue appear to be on his legs.

"Indeed, my lord duke," rejoined Mrs. Lacy, as soon as he could be spoken to with safety; "I wish it was in my power to obey your grace's commands."

"Heyday, madam! What! what!" said his grace, "I presume you are not like a post-office, where a

man can't get his own letter back when it is once put in the box?"

"I can send a messenger, if your grace wishes it," whimpered Lacy.

"A messenger!" cried the duke. "What do you mean, madam? Have you not got my letter?"

"I never was so vexed in all my life. I hope your grace will not be angry." (Here she pretended to cry.) "But the truth is, I knew that my dear, kind Miss Dareall was so anxious to know about the ball, and I was so anxious to tell her of—of—your grace's kindness, that—that—I despatched her groom instantly with your grace's letter and the parcel to Barnet after her. Hi! hi! But," she added, with vivacity, "I will take a cab instantly and go after him."

"No, no, my dear madam, I could not wait, I assure you. Was ever anything so unfortunate?" said the duke. "Give her my kind regards when she returns, and tell her not to injure her health by watching over her sick friend. Good girl! good girl!" And his grace bowed to Mrs. Lacy, nodded to Sir Harry, and toddled towards the door, where he paused. "Nothing infectious, I hope?" he inquired; "not scarlet fever?"

"No—o—o, your grace," returned the confidante, nearly choking herself with her handkerchief; "only a baby, and Miss Dareall is to be godmother. Such a fine boy, your grace—one of her dearest and oldest friends. Bless his little heart!"

"Stop!" said his grace to himself, and feeling in his pocket; "no, it's not mine, certainly; but, let

me see; you are a very good lady; eh, ma'am, oblige me." And he put a bank-note in her hand. "Lay it out for the little stranger—eh? eh? That's it—thank you—good afternoon."

And his grace toddled out, as Lacy flew to the bell, and thence to the head of the stairs, and then followed him to the street-door, reappearing a minute or two after with a remarkably amiable expression of countenance, which almost seemed to justify the duke's compliment to her good-nature.

"Infection! scarlet fever!" cried Sir Harry. "Do you know the consequences might have been serious? I never was so near bursting a blood-vessel in my life. You beat little Toole at the Adelphi. You haven't sent the groom, of course not; didn't I know that she is gone to Richmond? Ha! ha! let's have a look at the sparklers." Mrs. Lacy quietly took the case from her pocket, and displayed them with great composure. "But, I say, there's a flaw in this big one in the middle, and the rest are not—what do you call it?—rose-cut, or whatever it is—I mean, not so valuable as they look. I know Kitty's taste well. She won't care for these."

"I shouldn't wonder if she sent them back," said the lady. "She will, as soon as look at them, if she doesn't like them. She will be pleased with the vouchers, though, I know. I wouldn't have let him have them back for a trifle."

"But about poor Fido?" inquired Sir Harry, laughing. "I thought you had lost him?"

"So we did, a month ago," said the faithful Lacy.

"Well," rejoined Sir Harry, "I think I stood

godfather to that Barnet baby uncommonly well. I am glad, however, that you did not appeal to me to corroborate your tale, because that would have been awkward."

"La, Sir Harry!" said Mrs. Lacy, "of course I knew such a gentleman as you wouldn't betray a lady's secret; nor yet like to be found out in a fib."

"Found out?" said Sir Harry; "that is the last thing I should think of."

This was beyond Mrs. Lacy's powers of appreciation. To her fib-telling was a virtue, if undetected.

"Dear me, Sir Harry," she responded; "how odd you gentlemen are! But what would you be if the ladies didn't deceive you a little sometimes? I am sure you would not like to know all."

"Faith, not I!" answered the baronet. "It would destroy a good many pleasing delusions; wouldn't it?"

"Well, it might," was the reply. "Look at the dear old gouty duke. I am sure I wouldn't hurt his feelings, if I could help it, by telling him that Miss Dareall had gone out with that fellow for a drive."

"Putting aside the christening present for the baby at Barnet," said Sir Harry.

"Well," she said, "what is a baby more or less in a town like Barnet? Besides, if the truth must be spoken, I do know a lady there which has just got a beautiful baby, and a finer boy the duke himself couldn't wish for. But they say he doesn't wish for any; as I dare say you've heard, Sir Harry. Well, if

I was a duke, I shouldn't like to be without chick nor child."

"I'd rather have a dozen than the gout," said Sir Harry.

"Go along with you!" was Mrs. Lacy's response.

"To Barnet?" asked Sir Harry. "But I say, do you think it possible that Kitty can really mean to encourage the attentions of this man Aubrey?"

"I don't think she encourages anybody much," said Mrs. Lacy. "But I did think till this morning, that if there was any one in this world that was poison to her, as one might say, it was this very Aubrey. Why, she has never let him put foot in this house, since the first time he came here with Mr. Stingray, till this very morning. But then she is so contrary. She is not like any one else. I never know what she will do the next moment, and I don't think that she knows herself. The only thing she has kept to at all is this theatre business, and it wouldn't surprise me if she was to turn that up to-morrow."

"Ha! ha!" cried Sir Harry, "and leave all the folks at the Thespis, pit, boxes, and gallery, waiting for her at night, while she is off to Paris, or the Isle of Wight, or Brighton."

"That's just what I've expected for the last fortnight," said Lacy. "Only let any piece she is in have a long run, and see how she'll bolt. It's only the constant change of parts and dresses that will keep her, and so I made bold to tell Methusalem Wigster, Esquire. What a dear, nice, old, merry gentleman

he is. 'Mrs. Lacy,' he says, 'there's always a private box for you and any of your friends whom you like to ask; and be sure and let me know if Miss Dareall gets any nonsense into her head, in time to prevent it, if possible.' And that I will, you may be sure, though for that matter it mightn't be much use neither; but I do love to see her on the stage, and who knows what it will lead to?"

"All this puts me in mind," said Sir Harry, "that I quite forgot to ask her to speak to Wigster about a girl I want to get on in the ballet. She's both pretty and clever; only there's been illness at her home, and she couldn't keep her engagement at the Escorial, while she nursed her little brothers and sisters. That brute Slimy Cash dismissed her with a volley of oaths, and I've sworn never to enter the place again."

Mrs. Lacy shook her head. "You're a sad fellow," she said, "with your girls."

"I assure you," said Sir Harry, "she is as good and virtuous a creature as exists in the world."

"Though she knows you?" retorted Lacy.

"Though she knows me," was the reply.

"And very poor?"

"Very poor."

"Then you've only to tell some one we know," said Mrs. Lacy, "and she'll see her righted. There isn't a tenderer-hearted, sweeterer dispositioned girl than Kitty Dareall in the world, and I don't care where the other comes from, with all her fancies and funny ways; and, what's more, if you like to leave the particulars with me, I'll see it done, if I have to——"

"Send a special messenger to Barnet," interrupted Sir Harry, laughing.

"La, Sir Harry! How you do reckon a person up! I hope you don't think there was any harm in it."

"Who, I, dear Mrs. Lacy? It's no affair of mine, but I can't help laughing when I think of it." And Sir Harry began to cough and imitate the duke. "You're a good (*cough*), kind creature (*cough*), ma'am."

"There's one thing you haven't done, as he did," said Lacy.

"Oh, I understand," said Sir Harry; and he took out his pocket-book. "Only I haven't a hundred thousand pounds a-year, you know."

"I wish you had," said Lacy, "that I do; there's none I should like to see better with it. Bless your good heart! I was only joking like yourself. I wouldn't touch a penny of your money. I'd sooner burn my fingers off. There, put it back again. What do you take me for?"

"Nay," said Sir Harry, "you'll offend me, if you don't."

"Then offended you must be. No! I won't, I tell you, there!" cried Mrs. Lacy. "Come, I must be off; I've got all the dresses to look after. She plays to-morrow."

"Then," said Sir Harry, "if you are such a dear, obstinate creature, I must——"

And he actually snatched a kiss from the cheek of the middle-aged duenna.

"Go away, do, you audacious, impudent fellow!

I am sure *you* have no kisses to spare," said Lacy, smiling most graciously. "Dear me, it's past four o'clock, I declare."

Sir Harry kissed the tips of his fingers, and made a courtly bow, as he departed.

"Well," said Lacy, "if I was a young lady like Kitty, I know I'd rather stitch my fingers off for a man like him, than be mistress of a duke's mansion with twenty thousand a-year."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DRIVE TO RICHMOND.

Isora. I loved you, till you spoke to me of love;
 Nor feared you, till your passion bade me fear.
 You were my brother till you flung the name
 Away, and found no other that I like—
 When shall we land?

Antonio. Sangre de Dios—Never!

Isora. Is this your promise?

The Pirate of Genoa, Act i. Scene ii.

WE must now accompany the triumphant Aubrey and the dashing actress in their drive. Infatuated as was that reckless, and in this respect heartless, profligate, he was hardly prepared to face the fashionable crowd in the Park, considering his social and domestic ties. At least there was a struggle between shame and vanity in his mind. Ninety-nine out of a hundred of the men about town would have given much for such a chance as to be seen steering the inimitable and irrepressible Kitty Dareall through the double row of carriages by the Serpentine; and a very large percentage of married libertines would have jumped still more eagerly at the chance. But there were circumstances connected with Aubrey's

appearance in public with so celebrated a character as Kitty, which invested the act with peculiar drawbacks. It was, doubtless, in the worst sense, a triumph; for Miss Dareall had never shown such a marked preference for any one before. She always drove her own horses, and rode alone, attended by a groom; seldom encouraging any one to ride by her side for more than a minute or two, just to exchange courtesies, and, possibly, communicate a stray *on dit*. Therefore, to appear driving her in his own carriage was, as he knew, a thing that would immediately furnish scandal and conjecture to all London. Only a week before, she had actually laid her whip smartly across the shoulders of a noble lord, supposed to be inspired by a wager, who had been so devoid of manners as to persevere in riding alongside of her pony carriage, and in boring her with his impertinent remarks. The public on that occasion sided with her, and condemned the discomfited Lord Charles with the verdict of "Served him right." But Aubrey well knew that there was something in his own case beyond common imprudence or folly. His triumph was a *lâcheté*—an act of cowardly baseness. He was, at least, cowardly enough to feel that it was base, without possessing the self-control to avoid it. So, when he approached the Park by Constitution Hill, he felt anything but comfortable. What if the news should reach Blanche! He felt as if the eyes which envied would condemn him, and that those which utterly condemned would blister him. It was, therefore, with a great sensation of relief that, just as they passed St. George's Hospital, Miss Dareall inti-

mated that she would prefer a short drive in the country, avoiding the Park.

As they dashed along the road, he regained his spirits and self-possession, whilst his fair companion listened in silence to his endeavours to amuse her. She appeared to be in a thoughtful and pettish mood; but, sooth to say, the truant husband attributed this to some annoyance she had received that morning. Perhaps she did not like her new part; perhaps that odious, impertinent Luckless had annoyed her. On Aubrey alluding to the duke's visit and disappointment, and contrasting it with his own felicity, the lady laughed aloud so abruptly and sharply, as to cause her admirer to turn round and look at her, and thereby endanger the safety of the mail phaeton by grazing the wheel of a waggon in the narrow part of Kensington, where the road turns abruptly to the left. A shout of opprobrium and derision greeted him, such as the lower order of the British cockney is apt to indulge in on such occasions. One would think, to hear the expressions of drivers and coachmen, on the slightest possible provocation, and frequently with none at all, that driving must be the most ill-conditioned pursuit in the world. It is only necessary for two men to be driving opposite ways, or to get blocked up together, through circumstances for which neither is at fault, to create in a moment the deadliest enmity towards each other in their breasts. Could they leave their respective charges, they would take each other's lives, like a pair of Corsicans, or partisans in an old Scottish feud. Aubrey uttered an apology for

his bad driving, which he garnished with a somewhat commonplace compliment to his fair companion's charins.

"Oh!" she replied, rudely enough, "don't make any excuses for your awkwardness; I don't mind a spill in the least. I thought you were not much of a whip."

Aubrey bit his lip; but his vanity whispered that this was either badinage or coquetry. Perhaps she wanted to try his temper. So he answered, gaily enough, that he should be glad to take lessons from the queen of horsewomen and charioteers.

"And now, whither shall we drive?" he asked.

"You may go to Richmond, if you like," she answered. "So that I'm in town at eight, I don't care. I don't play to-night, and so I have made up a party to go to the Surrey Theatre, of all places in the world, to see some transpontine celebrity tear a passion to tatters. I have not ordered dinner at home; and so, if you please, we can get something there. We actresses have good appetites. We don't live on air, I promise you. But don't let me interfere with your arrangements. You may be expected home to dinner, you know."

"Oh, no! not in the least," stammered Aubrey.

The fact is, at that moment he recollected not only that he was expected home, but his promise to his wife, and the anniversary. Did his conscience not give him a severe twinge as he thought of her, so young, so beautiful, and so afflicted, and of his own base neglect and faithless behaviour? We believe that it did; but still he hardened his heart.

At any rate, he did not suffer his thoughts of home and Blanche to interfere much with the attention which he lavished on the unappreciative Miss Dareall. That young lady became every minute more defiant and disagreeable in her mode of repelling his courtesies. Any one would have thought that her object was not to fascinate, but to disgust her admirer. Strange to say, Aubrey, usually rather refined in his ideas, did not at all appear to take that view. Her undisguised vulgarity passed current for natural wit. He compared her in his mind with Peg Woffington and Mrs. Bracegirdle. He did not observe the contempt and sarcasm with which she received his advances. Probably, she understood thoroughly how to deal with a lover of this stamp. A votary of false love is like a votary of Bacchus. He sees neither the repulsive lineaments of his idol, nor the absurd and revolting antics of which he himself is guilty. Or, rather, he is like a fanatic who has imbibed the Indian *cannabis sativa*, or bhang. He cares not for wounds or blows; he clasps insults and injuries to his bleeding breast. He shouts "Evöe! evöe!" or whatever is equivalent to that classical expression of drunkenness; he wallows in mire, and dreams that it is a nectarean current whose golden waves bear him along in a delirium of sunshine and joy. He is in short a lunatic crowned as it were with the broken straws of sherry-cobblers trodden in the dust and mud of a mental Cremorne. Throughout all this delusion, however, *surgit amari aliquid*; there is a wrong flavour in every dish. A Scotch madman declared that every delicacy of which he fancied that

he partook tasted of porridge; and there was very good reason why it should, considering that it was his standing dish. There is a vein of unpleasant reality running through our Berserker's frenzy, which he cannot get rid of. The picturesque scenery will look like pasteboard every now and then, and the enchanted carbuncle will resolve itself into the aspect of common glass. Is it a pity or a gain that false pleasures have still their drawback, even while the demon continues loyal and the delusion lasts? We have always doubted whether Faust could be supposed actually to believe in the reality of the mock Helen, whom he saw. Certain it is, that as the fair *débutante* of the Thespis rattled on with the most unequivocal bad taste, and displayed all the exaggerated humours of her sex, Aubrey did not feel quite at his ease. Perhaps the thought occurred to him, "What if this irrepressible Siren were really mine? What if I were the guardian and possessor of these mercurial charms?" Perhaps he trembled on the threshold of so much happiness. Perhaps the pale image of the suffering Blanche arose occasionally, as the phantom of Gretchen on the Brocken smote the senses of the dazzled and bewildered Faust. Then the fascination seized him again. Was not the fair creature at his side, whom all London—i.e., all the London he knew, and a good deal besides—admired and adored? Certainly the divinity was loud in her voice, and somewhat coarse and unlady-like in her ideas. Twice she had called him a fool, by way of answer to some observation he had made. When he talked of love, and music, of poetry, and flowers, she laughed out-

right in his face. When he asked her if she admired Tennyson, not exactly in such prosaic phraseology, but endeavoured to lead her to display her æsthetic perceptions of the chief of the modern poetic school of song, all that he elicited was "Combien?" accompanied by a yawn. When he spoke of the exquisite new old style of painting of which Rossetti is king, the drawings and portraits of Sandys, and such topics of enlightened talk, she asked him whom he thought the best "photo-grifer" to take a woman on horseback, and expatiated on the fast beauties of a low-crowned round man's hat as the most becoming equestrian covering for a lady's head. Then she declared she was dying of thirst, and must have a glass of "pale." So they actually had to pull up at a roadside public, to the infinite horror of Tops, who, however he might affect such a proceeding on his own account, when waiting with the trap anywhere for his master on the road or in town, by no means approved of it under present circumstances. But then, was not all this, in Aubrey's mind, a delightful contrast to the staid hypocritical humbug of polite life? Perhaps it was. At all events his gratified excitement and vanity received no serious check. As they approached Richmond, Miss Dareall became even more outrageous in her open warfare against propriety and decorum. She insisted upon changing places with Aubrey and driving the "trap." She struck the near chesnut a smart stroke with the whip, against Aubrey's earnest caution and entreaty, and endangered the safety of the party, the horses actually bolting for half a mile along the road, which, to judge

by her shrieks of laughter, afforded her infinite pleasure and delight. She accused Aubrey of being afraid, and finished by being sullen and savage, in which mood she arrived at Richmond, at the inevitable "Comet and Stay-lace," where a collation was immediately ordered by Aubrey, in obedience to the loudly expressed wishes of the lady, who jumped down so suddenly as nearly to knock over a brace of waiters and an aged and attendant groom.

"Well!" said Tops to himself, "whatever can the governor be about? I am glad it's the last time I'm likely to be one of sech a party of escaped loonatics. If I hadn't already turned the governor up this morning, I'd do it when we got home. As for her——" Here the feelings of Mr. Tops found vent in a prolonged whistle; after which he followed the horses into the stable to see that they were properly done, and to examine into the quality of the Richmond oats, or at least that sample of them afforded by the resources of the "Comet and Stay-lace." During the drive to this chosen retreat of metropolitan recreation, Mr. Tops had displayed a demeanour something between that of a Roman freedman mourning over some patrician disgrace, and the cynical ease of haughty indifference which modern servitude assumes, when regarding with serene contempt the pretensions or follies of its temporary employer. Mr. Tops had sat in the phaeton with folded arms, as much as possible on one side, and behind his master. His countenance was as unmoved and inscrutable as that of the Sphinx. The severest criticism of bystander or passer-by would not have

elicited a spark of anger or intelligence from his eyes; much less a gesture of impatience from his person, or a comment from his lips. A Sphinx with a turned-up nose, and a cockade in its hat, and bearing the slightest resemblance to a London groom, might be a curiosity; and yet the expression of Mr. Tops was at least as fixed as that of the Egyptian deity. Let it not be understood that he by any means despised or hated Miss Dareall. Strange to say, he rather at that moment coveted the post of groom to that lady. He admired her horsemanship, her style, and her daring. "She is a rare plucked un," he would say, "and no mistake." The relation, however, which he held towards his own "missus," whom he respected more than any human being, utterly precluded the realisation of the idea which had certainly presented itself to his fancy. He saw that she treated his master with utter contempt and derision, and he liked her for it. He did not like her in "our pheayton." His indignation was colossal when Aubrey, some few days before, had sent Grey Leila, his dear mistress's own mare, round to Miss Dareall's house, for that young lady to try her paces in the Park. Indeed, so strongly did he object to such a sacrilege, that he would not take the animal round himself, nor even saddle and bridle her. He deputed "a young man" whom he knew, to do a thing which he found so distasteful. Had Aubrey ordered him to ride after her, he would have given warning that instant. But to say that he disliked Miss Dareall on private and personal grounds would be far from true. Had Susan known what was going on, how she would have hated

her—her good qualities in all probability more than her bad. How she would have derided her dress, horsemanship, dancing, swimming, skating, everything in which she excelled. Probably she would have found most fault with the only redeeming part of Kitty's reputation. "Oh, she's a nice modest dear," she would have cried; "the hypocritical Jezebel!" But men do not judge of the opposite sex thus. Had Aubrey been unmarried, Tops would have greatly commended his taste in paying attention to a young lady so much after his own heart as Miss Dareall. In a word, he condemned his master, and not the enchantress.

On entering the "Comet and Stay-lace," Miss Dareall declared herself dying of hunger. She and Aubrey were shown into a room looking upon the river, over a pleasant garden, and when the waiter submitted the bill of fare, she was so fanciful and capricious that it was with difficulty any conclusion could be arrived at, at all. The order, however, once given, was speedily attended to; but when the repast made its appearance, she declared she could not touch a morsel of anything, declined all or any of the wines specially demanded by Aubrey, and in which she had the chief voice, sulked, pouted, frowned, and suddenly rising, protested she could not stay an instant longer, and desired that the horses might be put to immediately. When Aubrey demurred to this, and begged her to take a morsel of refreshment and remain an hour—one short hour longer, she turned upon him almost fiercely.

"Well," she said, "here I am, and what have

you to say? You have been very anxious to entertain me, and I have given you the opportunity. It appears to me that you have not exactly succeeded. And now let me ask you to what precise idea I am indebted for all this constant attention, this exceedingly demonstrative solicitude" (and she made a most provoking curtsy). "If you have any idea of coming out as a burlesque writer, certainly I will do the civil thing with Wigster; but I must not encourage your hopes. He is overstocked with pieces. In fact, I told him the other day, that the best thing he could do would be to make a bargain with a waste-paper merchant; five pounds a ton is not to be despised in these days. Dramas weigh heavily, especially when in five acts, and farces tell up in number. There, don't look angry. Your piece is not sent in yet, is it?"

"Indeed," replied Arthur, not knowing whether to pretend to look amused or not, "though I plead guilty to have written more than one play, I have not flung myself upon the tender mercies of your impresario."

"What do you want, then?" asked Miss Dareall, assuming a look of stolid inquiry.

"Can you ask me?" returned Aubrey.

"I do ask you," said the lady. "I have asked you, I believe. Do you wish me to repeat the question?"

Aubrey was what is called a lady's man, very popular amongst women in all ranks; but he felt rather disconcerted by the abrupt manner of the actress.

"You must long have seen—have known," he

began, "my too evident admiration of—of—qualities so admirable, so adorable—that—ah, dear Miss Dareall! who can, who would resist charms that——"

Here she interrupted him, so that we cannot exactly say how his declaration might have terminated. During these few words she had been impatiently beating a sort of tattoo with one of her small feet; but as if disinclined to hear more, she rose, drew herself up, and advanced a pace towards him.

"Ha! ha!" she began, with an indefinable taunting regard, "and have you brought me to Richmond to hear this sort of rubbish, of which I am sickened every day of my life? Do you want to rehearse burlesque here with me? If so, you are guilty of a presumption, a conceit, an insolence, that I confess I did not think was in you. I really must compliment you upon the sublimity of your impertinence. So, sir, you thought, I suppose, that you had won a simple girl's heart by your bouquets and your grimaces."

"Oh, Miss Dareall! listen, I beseech, I entreat you!" recommenced our hero, feeling, it must be owned, excessively foolish.

"No!" she answered, "I request, I command you to listen to me. But first, there is something to be done, a little act of restitution. Here, sir, are sundry trifles which have gone astray." And she produced a packet from a small reticule which she had brought with her. "Your letters and notes," she said, "I need not and cannot return. They were burnt; sometimes partly read, and sometimes, I must confess, unperused; unless my maid has a taste

for such light literature. There is no knowing what rubbish may entertain a servant-girl or a milliner, especially when the theme is love. Love! did I say? It is a commodity of which I must profess my ignorance; unless, as some good-natured folks might say, it may be the market value of the thing. Well, if there is such a reality as love, I profane it in connexion with your audacious vanity."

"Miss Dareall!" began Aubrey, "if you wish only to insult me——"

"Sir," she interrupted, "have you not sufficiently insulted me? You have brought this on your own head. You brought me to this place, you have arranged this tête-à-tête, and you shall hear me. When you have heard all I have to say on this matter, it will then be a question how far I may pardon you for the insult you have offered me; on one condition."

"If there is a condition I can offer to gain your regard," cried Aubrey, "name it, I pray. Unfortunately as I am situated, if——"

"Silence!" she cried. "In the first place oblige me by taking back these baubles, which I never meant to keep. The flowers which you sent were invariably, by my orders, thrown away. This cross," she said, "is a pretty thing enough. I must compliment you on your taste in jewellery. I wish I could do as much in matters more important. Take these where you should take them; take this, where it may grace a purer bosom and a fairer throat. Not a word. Take them, I say, or I will fling them at you!"

Aubrey obeyed in silence. The truth is, he was

fairly embarrassed and overawed. There was something equally beautiful and terrible in the aspect of this young girl, so suddenly transformed from frivolity and vulgarity to the majesty of rebuke. He had never seen her attired in a tithe of the fascination which she now wore. She looked like some graceful denizen of the forest; a female panther or puma, aroused in defence of her young. Her lithe and supple form fell into every attitude of natural grace as she spoke; a bright colour glowed in place of the usual soft and delicate bloom of her cheeks, and her large grey eyes seemed to dilate and expand with light. As we have said, she owed more to expression than to strict beauty; and certainly on this occasion, her varied expression conveyed a charm often wanting to features of a more classic and regular turn. It must be owned that Aubrey's position was exceedingly absurd, and that he most richly deserved it. Ashamed, irritated, and still more fascinated than ever by the object of his guilty and insane passion, he stood very much like a schoolboy detected and arrested in some flagitious act, disappointed and afraid, yet full of impotent rage.

"Sit down, I beg of you," said Miss Dareall.

Aubrey mechanically obeyed her, and awaited what further she might say. Still he was not without a hope that she had merely been trying his temper and patience, or had been playing a part, and would alter her tone. She advanced to the window and looked out upon the fair garden and the bright river which flowed past its bounds.

"It is early in the year," she said; "but how beautiful that gleam of sunshine on the water. Why," she cried, turning round fiercely upon him, "did you bring me into the country? I tell you that I hate it; the beauty of nature maddens me; the sunshine and green fields stir all the gall within my breast. I would only be brought amidst fields and trees and flowers to die—do you hear me? to die!"

"Are you ill, Miss Dareall?" inquired Aubrey, "or have you lost your senses?"

"Listen, sir," she replied, "you are, I believe, a gentleman. I know little or nothing of your private character; for I have never cared to inquire. I never liked you, nor in truth disliked you. I only see in you one out of a herd of selfish men who flatter a woman, out of mingled vanity and fashion, and tell her, with the nauseating professions which it were a charity to imagine they themselves believe, they cherish for her the passion of love. But for two reasons, I would treat you as I would any other out of the herd. I would encourage you for interested motives, or spurn you for the choice of a wealthier rival and dupe; deceive and disappoint you if I encouraged you, and hate and scorn you in either case alike."

"To what does this tend? What reasons do you mean?" asked Aubrey, with increasing surprise.

"It once fell to your lot to do me a kindness. The act and the motive were perhaps scarcely worthy of each other, but into that I will not inquire. I will give you credit for both alike."

"A kindness? May I ask what it was?" said Aubrey. "Believe me, when I say that I have not the slightest idea——"

"Nor ever will have," was the reply. "Suffice it to say that it was done. But for that we should probably at this moment not be—here. But for that, and another reason, I certainly had not taken the trouble to accompany you to Richmond this afternoon."

"I adjure you, if you have any feeling, any kindness in return, since you say I had the good fortune to do you a favour, tell me at least some motive," said Aubrey, "some reason for conduct so extraordinary, and language so strange."

"Feeling? Ought I to indulge in such a luxury?" she answered. "Is not that a monopoly of the aristocratic and the virtuous heart? What if I tell you, then, that somewhere here" (placing her hand upon her heart), "very deeply hidden and known only lately even to myself, and to myself alone, is something which, had it the opportunity of expansion, could it live in the atmosphere of falsehood and deception around, might make me loathe myself almost as thoroughly and deservedly as I despise you!"

"What can she mean?" exclaimed Aubrey. "Is she mad, or is it——?"

"You are mistaken in all that you would surmise. You cannot imagine the truth," was the reply. "But if you have a heart, a soul; if you have ever known the love and care of a mother, which I have not; the affection of a sister, pure and gentle, as I

have only known the sisterhood of frailty and shame, you will not seek to misunderstand that which I am about to say, and you will, at least with these advantages, attempt to rival me in the common attributes of humanity which are supposed to raise us above the level of the brutes."

"To what can all this tend?" uttered Aubrey.

"I suppose," she continued, "that there is a great moral distinction between such a being as you would make me—nay, such as I am—and yourself. You would, and could, return to Society and decorum, to sister and mother, to your wife, into company to which I might not aspire, forsooth! whence I should be thrust forth, if I intruded myself. What is this difference which exists between you and the frailest of my sex? I tell you that, compared with your present conduct, the darkest error—sin if you like—of my history is innocence itself."

"What do you mean?" inquired Aubrey, hesitatingly.

"Can you ask me?" she replied. "Man, if I were to name it, if there be justice, it should strike you—*blind!*"

"Stop! stop!" he exclaimed.

"You have a wife—have you not?" she continued. "Her name is Blanche!"

"Silence! silence! I insist upon it!" cried Aubrey.

"What! Do I sully her name by pronouncing it?" resumed Miss Dareall. "A wife! I say again, young and beautiful in spite of her affliction, and who loves you in proportion to the contempt which you merit at her hands. Oh, I know all! You are

breaking her heart to follow me who despise you, and you are even offended that I should mention her name, miserable impostor and hypocrite that you are !”

At this last insult, Aubrey could contain himself no longer. He sprang to his feet and looked towards the door, as if for escape. The look was not lost upon her, who continued :

“Be seated, sir, I pray. “Well, then, shall I tell you that I am *not* fit to breathe her name? Oh, I am speaking truth. Shall I disenchant you further? Shall I tell you the whole story of my life? Nay, ’twould be safe with you; for the sake of your own vanity—one of the strongest holds upon a selfish man. Shall I tell you the story of the last three months, the last fortnight, while you have been besetting my door—the lies and the pretences, the woman’s artifices, the flattery of the old, the cajolery of the young? Shall I tell you how I was fished up by the hair with a chance drag, ha! ha! from the mud and filth of London streets—how I was lost in drunkenness, in penury, and sin? You start, do you? You shrink—how dare you shrink, man, from me?”

She paused awhile, as if to collect herself; and then resumed, whilst Aubrey stood as if rooted to the floor in a deprecating attitude, but uttered not a word. The truth is, that he was shocked as well as ashamed. There was a terrible earnestness about this creature, which could not leave him in doubt as to the truth of what she said. The fact is, when a man meets a beautiful woman who is the centre of adoration,

he does not at first trouble himself to consider how she came there. Miss Dareall's antecedents were the last thing into which it had as yet occurred to Aubrey to inquire.

"Well," she continued, "I was taken, and redeemed from penury and its attendant horrors by a Saint in Heaven, whose memory I reverence too much to tell you more than that I owe him life, education, and such prosperity as I now enjoy. Had he lived—— But why do I prate about myself? Only to tell you what it is that you approach with your *fade* flatteries, your sickening daily dose of admiration. Never approach my door again, I tell you, or my male friends shall hound you from it, my female acquaintance jeer at you; until your name becomes a byword for spurned and rejected pretensions—menial love. But no, no; I will not continue thus. Sir, I beg and implore you to return to her who pines for your presence in your home—who may be dying for all that you know at this very moment, deserted and alone."

Aubrey started with conscious horror that it might be so. The tones of the strange being who thus rebuked him had suddenly changed. Her accents were the spoken contralto of pathos itself.

"They tell me," she continued, almost in a breath, "that her eyes are beautiful as ever. Is it so? Oh, shame on you! shame on you! to deprive her, so stricken, of the daily and hourly solace of a loved voice, of words of tenderness and affection. Believe me, you love her still. You are playing with your choicest blessing, like a child. You are not utterly

bad and heartless. If another were at her feet now, would it not madden you? It would! it would! You start at the very thought."

"Oh, this is too much!" cried Aubrey, moved and repentant.

"Hear me!" resumed the actress, from whose face every vestige of colour had flown, and whose eyes were now misty and clouded, as if unseen tears had gathered behind them, that waited a signal to break forth. "I have never had any real happiness in this world. Let me owe to you at least one good action in my life. If I cannot love you, let me, at least, honour and respect your memory as a friend. Let me think of you kindly and gratefully in the few moments when I do think, and perhaps I shall sometimes owe to you better and happier thoughts. See! I implore you, with clasped hands, to do this." And here she suited the action to the word. "You will go to her—will you not?—who loves you so well, who is so worthy of the best man's love? I have heard of her actions at a distance, her noble charity, her benevolent heart. You will go to her, will you not, and abandon for ever this mad infatuation, which must seem to you like a hideous dream?"

Aubrey made no answer, but turned away, and covered his eyes with his hands. .

"Yes!" she cried, "I have conquered. I see that you are deeply moved. You will go to her——"

"I will, I will," he answered, huskily. "I swear it!"

"I need no oath," she said, in accents of bitter melancholy; "I have heard too many—known too

many broken. But I believe your word. I have marked your every gesture. I know that you have only neglected her, because you felt so secure of her love. But bethink you always, should you trifle further with that love, a rival may step in whom Purity herself may not baffle—the skeleton seducer, Death!”

“Villain! blind and selfish villain that I have been!” was all that Aubrey could utter.

“I was speaking the other day,” resumed the actress, “with one who knows her well, and who loves her with all the devotion of a generous heart.”

“Ha! who is he?” exclaimed Aubrey. “I will chastise him, be he who he may.”

“How like a man!” she returned. “You have not the right, even were he only less culpable than you have been yourself. But, believe me, your anger is without cause. He is too noble to take such an advantage, even were he cursed with the chance. I tell you he respects her, as she deserves and commands respect.”

“Tell me, at least, who he is,” said Aubrey. “You may do so safely, if it be as you say, and I believe your every word.”

“One whom I once thought—— But that weakness is past,” she answered; “although it may have wrung my heart silently; more than I have dared to acknowledge, even to myself. Nay, do not ask me. It is a woman’s secret, though never to be told. Go, Mr. Aubrey, to your beautiful and confiding wife. I have a presentiment that I shall see her soon,

although at a distance, and unknown. For between us there is a gulf deeper than yon darkening stream. And now, farewell!"

"And will you not give me your hand?" he asked, as she moved towards the door.

"In token of this compact alone," she answered; giving it to him, with a calm and sad dignity, which contrasted strikingly with the impetuosity of her previous address.

"Stay, stay!" he exclaimed, as she would have passed him on her way out. "And you, yourself, singular and gifted being, what of yourself, your own career? You are not happy. I seem to have read a world of sorrow in your eyes just now, when you ceased to upbraid me so bitterly, and appealed only to my better feelings; to a soul that is not dead to repentance for my folly. Tell me, are you really devoted to your present life; and this wild, exciting career, does it fill your heart? Something tells me that it will not last. Some day you may need a friend in the true sense of the term, one whom you have rescued from evil and won to good. If ever you need assistance, you will come to me for it, will you not? Henceforth, I promise to live a new life, to abandon the associates with whom I have too long vied, and to devote myself to her whom I have treated with such cruel neglect. You, too, will change, will you not? And then, believe that in him to whom you have read to-day a lesson which he has so well merited, you will find a brother, a friend!"

"Do not trouble yourself about me," replied Miss

Dareall. "I know not what I may do yet. I am changeable as my career, fickle as my involuntary fate. But order your horses round, and hasten home. How strangely dark it has grown. We are about to have a storm. There! Did you see that flash? The day has been unusually close and oppressive. There again! Pray make haste, or you may be detained here for hours."

"No, no! I fear no storm," said Aubrey. "But you? Am I to leave you here? How are you to get home? Let me see you at least to town."

"Nay," said Miss Dareall, smiling; "that would be a bad beginning. Consider what remarks might be made. They might even reach *her* ears; and then—I think you have run sufficient risk already in driving me here. Order your carriage round. Must I insist?"

Aubrey left the room, and returned in a minute. "I have obeyed you," he said; "and now, I suppose, I must bid you farewell."

"Yes," she answered, "and for ever! Cease, I beg of you, to think of me at all; unless a thought of what I have been, nay, am, cause you to cling closer and more fondly to her by whose pure affection you are blest."

"It may sound like an impertinence under the circumstances," said Aubrey; "but once more remember, that if I can ever be of any service to you, I implore you not to forget me then."

"I will not forget, Mr. Aubrey," she returned hurriedly, but kindly; "but pray do not pro-

long this interview; good-bye, and may you be happy."

Aubrey bowed very low, and left the room hastily.

"How little he thought," mused Miss Dareall to herself, "of the service that he once rendered me. And it is only three years ago. Heavens! what a flash!" she exclaimed, as the lightning quivered along the black arch of the storm-cloud whose summit already reached the zenith, illuminating the dark landscape and the winding river beneath. "Well, I must see about getting back to town. I feel quite faint for want of refreshment. I wish that tiresome waiter had not taken everything away. I declare I really felt nearly all that I said. I must make haste and get rid of all this goodness, or else I shall be quite unfitted for the theatrical world of spite. I am sure that even old Wigster would make love to me, if he dared, with his affectionate and paternal style. Well, considering the youthful parts he plays on the stage, one need not wonder much, if he forgets himself sometimes off it. After all, why should he not, when Juliets over fifty are in vogue? And that burlesque the other day which looked as if it was played by the inmates of dramatic almshouses returned again to visit the scenes of their former career! As for Luckless, I don't believe half that he said about his love for Aubrey's wife. Poor Harry! he is always in love with some one, and latterly I thought that if ever he was earnestly smitten, it was with poor little me. Some women would hate her for it; I do not. Gracious me, what a storm! I should like to see this Mrs. Aubrey, just once. When Harry

told me of her blindness, I recollected all about her. It was she who succoured that poor girl, who worked for my maid, Floret. The poor thing was betrayed and deserted—all in the regular and approved style of such things. Mrs. Aubrey—it was before she was blind—heard of it through her maid, and actually went to see her, without a tract or a sermon. She took her child in her arms, spoke to her like a sister, got her out of her troubles, and never so much as spoke a word of condemnation or reproof. Floret almost cried when she told me of it. Well, I hope I have done her some good in return.”

After thus uttering her thoughts aloud, Miss Dareall looked out of the window, shook her head, rang the bell, and ordered, to the waiter’s intense surprise, a glass of wine and a biscuit.

“Well,” said that worthy to another gentleman of the same cloth, as he went out to execute the command. “This is the finest start that I ever see. Here’s a couple come here; gent orders first-rate dinner—female party quite the lady, and seems as if nothing would please her—and they finish by touching nothing, not so much as a spoonful of soup. Gent pays for everything just the same, and I clapped in a bottle of wine as he didn’t order along with them as he did, but didn’t drink; but he never so much as looked at the bill. Now, there’s folks as comes here, as eat and drink everything they’ve ordered, and then question everything in the bill. ‘Waiter,’ they say, ‘was there three glasses of curassoey? I thought there was only two.’ But, lawk, I know my customers in a minute. I can tell

'em—ah ! by the way they wear their gloves, if that was all. If a gent don't put on his right-hand glove, and squeezes it all up like, though it's new French kid, I guess he won't add up the hitems of his bill, no, nor count his change neither for that matter. But for a regular out-and-out mean hunks, give me a rich earl, like that old Tipton and Wednesday, or the Markis of Spitalfields. It's lucky that there ain't many of such a scaly lot. There's the earl, he never pays waiter nor driver ; and as for the markis, he'll step into the bar about one o'clock, and he says to the missus quite gracious, 'What have you got for dinner, to-day?' says he ; so they tell him roast leg of mutton, or pork, as the case may be, for they're up to his little ways. 'Ah !' he says, 'I think I could eat a bit, if you was to cut me plateful, and send it up-stairs.' Then they say, just for form's sake, 'We've everything in the 'ouse, my lord. Your lordship can have whatever your lordship pleases.' 'You're very good,' he says, 'but I wouldn't have you take the trouble of cooking for me. If you do 'appen to 'ave such a thing as a nice potato,' he'll say, as if he didn't know there was. Then by-and-bye he comes into the bar again, and asks what he has to pay. 'I can't think of charging you anything, except the beer, my lord,' says the governor. 'I assure your lordship, we feel so honoured,' he says. 'I can't hear of such a thing,' says the markis. 'I only hope your lordship could make shift to eat it?' says the missus, smiling. 'Never enjoyed anything so much in my life, ma'am,' he says, quite politely ; and he hands her a shilling,

out of which she takes twopence, or fourpence, or whatever it may be for the beer. 'Well,' he says to the governor, 'my esteemed and worthy friend Tomkins,' he says, 'I suppose I must let you 'ave your own way, but it's only on one condition, you know.' 'And what may that be, my lord?' says the missus. 'Why, that when my friend here,' says the markis, condescendingly, 'appens to come by Pinchin Castle, he shall come and dine with me.' 'Ah! my lord,' says the governor, quite overcome, 'you're too good,' he says. As if he didn't know all the time that the servants at the castle, which is nine miles off, without counting the havenue, is all on board wages, ever since the markis prosecuted his cook for stealing the dripping, at Mumboro' Spring Sizes, just three years ago this very month. But as I heard old Rumford of the 'Angel and Umbrella' say, 'I wish I had a few of the same sort to drop in here. I'd stand 'em vittles, ah, and drink too,' says he. 'Look at the custom the harystocracy brings with 'em, wherever they go,' he says. And it's true. A lord who comes reglar, is worth his weight in silver, except to waiters. But then, if he brings them to the house that do pay us, why I suppose, in the end, he may be said to benefit we. As for the markis, I will say he is very pleasant and well-spoken—he'll talk to any one by the hour, and always calls every one by his name. But I never did see any one hated like that Lord Tipton. You should hear his own servants reckon him up. He don't grudge himself anything, nothing isn't good enough for him; but he is as proud as he is mean, and that's saying a good deal—that is,

a deal more than I should like to have said of me, if I'd got as much in a year, as they say he has in a day."

During the garrulous old waiter's talk, which was partly to himself, and partly to any one he could get to listen to him, Miss Dareall had finished her biscuit and her toilet, and was hurrying through the hall to gain the fly which was waiting to convey her to the station, when an exclamation of surprise and delight arrested her steps, and turning round she saw Sir Harry Luckless in the act of taking off his great-coat, and accompanied by a lady and gentleman, who were being ushered into the very room she had left.

"Good Heavens! Kitty, how fortunate!" cried Sir Harry; "that is if you are alone, as you seem to be. Here I am, a wretched 'third party' with Swellingham (you know Swellingham?) and Ada Montmorency, of the Hesperides. Do take pity on me and join us. But whatever brought you here? Are you really alone?"

"Very much, indeed," she replied.

"I thought you went out with that fellow Aubrey," said Sir Harry; "of course, just because I asked you not."

"So I did," she answered; "but not as you are pleased to imagine, in order to annoy you. For once I have been in earnest. I have done all; more than you asked me. I came here with him, and he has returned home, alone, full of repentance, and determined never again to neglect his afflicted wife."

“You are a dear, good girl,” said Sir Harry; “but come, do tell me all about it. I was quite puzzled to know what on earth you meant; what induced you to drive out here with him? I met Stingray, as we came through Knightsbridge, and I pulled up a moment! ‘Whom do you think I saw just now?’ he said, and then he told me about you and Aubrey driving past. He said you were so busy talking that you didn’t see him, though he was crossing the road. Didn’t the horses shy at anything? For I am sure he is ugly enough. ‘A pretty scandal there’ll be to-morrow,’ he said; ‘I only hope it won’t come to Mrs. Aubrey’s ears.’ And then he said something, for which I could have struck him; only that it would be so ridiculous a thing to have an affair with a literary celebrity, you know.”

“What was it?” asked Miss Dareall; “I detest that man, for his utter badness of heart. Society photographs him as a kind of virtuous sage, hiding his kindness under an eccentric mask. But I know him,” she said.

“A brutal allusion to her blindness,” replied Sir Harry, “worthy of the man. But he has learnt to pass current his most diabolical remarks and suggestions by a sort of sugared confectionery of poisoned words, as, for instance, ‘Have you heard that Wiggins is about to be sold up, poor dear old boy!’ or ‘Isn’t it a sad affair that of Lord Fitzpavin and his wife? Poor thing! poor thing! It was not her fault after all, considering the circumstances—was it?’ But we must not stand talking here in this manner.

Join our party, and let me escort you back to town in the train. Didn't you say you were going to the Surrey Theatre this evening?"

"I had some idea of it, I believe," she replied.

"Well, then," said Sir Harry, "what can be better? We'll all go together, get out at Waterloo, and set the elements at defiance. Have you dined? No; that's capital. Come in, and let me introduce you to Montmorency. Swellingham is not half such a fool as he affects to be, I assure you. I rather like the man. I knew him do a fine thing once; and do you know he has always pretended ever since that it was a mistake, and he didn't mean it. He saved a man and his wife from drowning in a canal; and when they turned out to be small tradespeople in the City, Swell declared that he himself fell in, and that the drowning people caught hold of him whether he would or no, and that it took nearly the whole of Price and Gosling's stock of perfumery to cleanse him from their touch. And the best joke is that he himself is a tradesman's son. But come in, there's a dear Kitty."

Miss Dareall signified her acquiescence.

"I never required a little cheerful conversation more than I do now to restore me to the delights of this sinful world," she said. "Do you know, Harry, I have preached such a sermon that I ended by almost converting myself. If goodness is only half as infectious as wickedness, I advise you not to come near me; unless you want to reform and take to out-door preaching, or build a little Bethel all your own, and become a second Burgeon. What a lot of

braces and slippers you would get from the female part of your congregation! Here, tell them to send that conveyance back to the stable. The driver is getting quite wet."

So saying, she entered the room, and introduced herself to Sir Harry's companions with all the non-chalance in the world.

CHAPTER X.

A CAB HOME.

Haste! Devour the ground!
 Play not with good intentions, lest they aid
 To pave thy road below. Remember, Fate
 Owes thee her blackest grudge, as one who late
 Despised her choicest gifts.

Thou'rt neck and neck
 With swift Misfortune. Pause not on the way,
 But spur and whip. Thou yet may'st be in time.
 He sleeps! Will no good angel in his ear
 Shout, trumpet-tongued, of fire and mad alarms?
 And dress his heels with wings like Mercury,
 And send him breathless home? No angel good
 Attends him now. Gross sense doth weigh him down.
 One half-hour late! 'Tis done; and nought remains,
 Save the dark vista of remorseful Woe.

WE must now follow Aubrey, who drove rapidly back to town, heedless of the gathering storm. Behind him the Sphinx-like Tops, chuckling inwardly at the manifest symptoms of a quarrel between his master and Miss Dareall, which he plainly read. Since his marriage, Aubrey had not thought so deeply and seriously as he did now, subsequently to his interview with the actress. The scales had fallen from his eyes. "It is I; it is I," he said, "who have been blind. But I will make amends for all.

We will quit this hated and pernicious atmosphere of London life. We will go to Switzerland and Italy. I must economise for a year or two, and then we will take a pretty seaside house, and I will devote myself to literary pursuits, and perhaps—who knows?—become famous as a writer. This, with a little boating, shooting, and fishing, will afford me sufficient occupation. If my dear, noble Blanche should not recover her sight, I will show that I am worthy of her love. Bless her, poor darling! how brutally I have behaved to her of late!" Strange to say, he had never felt such warm, earnest, nay, even passionate love for his beautiful partner in life, as at that moment. The words of Miss Dareall had not only disenchanted him of his penchant for that eccentric young lady herself; but they had restored to him the real and abiding sentiment of his heart. Her suggestion that he might in any way, or from any cause, lose Blanche, pierced his very soul with a vague sense of dread. Lose her? No! He felt that, without her, life would be a blank! And by his own folly, cruelty, and neglect! It was not to be thought of. He would rush to her, clasp her in his arms, avow in general terms the senseless conduct of which he had been guilty, and promise never to leave her fair side unguarded any more.

"Yes," he said, "coward! unfeeling brute that I have been! But I will make ample amends. And, oh! if aught on earth can bring back the sight to her sweet eyes, it shall be done!" Yet as he approached town, strange to say, Aubrey felt a disinclination to return home immediately. True, she

expected him; but if she waited an hour or two longer, it would be the last time he would keep her waiting in anxiety, or break an appointment with her. So he drove to one of his clubs, and told Tops to return, and to tell his mistress, with his best love, not to wait dinner, but to expect him for certain before ten.

If we must analyse the mixed motives which led to this conclusion, they were as follows:—In the first place he was flushed, sick, and excited; he did not like to rush straight into her presence from that of the Siren who had just voluntarily broken the spell of her enchantments. He wished to collect his thoughts, to regain his moral equilibrium, before meeting her whom he had wronged. Besides, he had a little design. There were all these presents he had received back from Miss Dareall. He would take them to the jeweller, who should exchange them on his own terms; and he would purchase a magnificent present for his wife on the anniversary evening of their wedding-day. The price allowed he would remit anonymously to the actress. It must be owned, that for a man involved in debt, if not hopelessly embarrassed, Aubrey was most magnificent and princely in his ideas. He would do all this, dine alone at the club, smoke a single cigar, and then, calm in his virtuous resolve, seek Blanche, never, never to neglect and desert her again! How happy she would be to travel, to visit Italy—it had been one of her fondest wishes, her most favourite desires. He sighed as he thought that she could not see those blue skies, those lilac mountains, those golden sun-

sets and brief purple twilights; but, at least, he thought, I will be her interpreter, her link of communication with the outer world. And she will be happy, yes, she will be happy; for she loves me as I do not deserve to be loved. And so, thus thinking of plans for future happiness, he betook himself to the jeweller's shop, which occupied an hour or so, and thence returned to his club, where he partook of a simple dinner alone, with an appetite sharpened by a mental ease and comfort which he had not known for some time. It was about half-past eight, when he sauntered up from the coffee-room to the smoking-room, which he found empty, and then with one of those large full-flavoured cigars, which are so grateful to a smoker now and then, when he devotes himself systematically to the full enjoyment of a "weed," Arthur Aubrey sat down, and gave himself up to the sober contemplation of the new life which he promised himself. And then, he thought, if we should have a child, a boy! or a little girl with Blanche's great soft eyes, and long silky hair. And so the time passed, and another hour crept on, as the timepiece over the mantelpiece kept up its monotonous tick, tick, until he began to think about returning home, and just as he thought he really must move, his head drooped, the remnant of his second cigar fell from the releasing grasp of his finger and thumb, and Arthur Aubrey slept. It was a quarter-past ten when he awoke from a confused dream, and endeavoured to recal the varied incidents of the day. As he stretched himself and looked around, a gleam of blue light illuminated the circular skylight of the smoking-room,

followed by a crash of thunder so startling and instantaneous that it thoroughly finished the awakening process and restored him to his full consciousness of all that had passed, why he was there, and where he ought to have been at that hour. "Good Heavens!" he muttered, "the storm has returned with a vengeance. What tremendous rain—nay, surely it is hail, by the sound." Another and another flash and peal followed. He then remembered, as he hurriedly descended the stairs, that he had dreamt of a military execution, which was somehow mixed up with Blanche, whose white and agonising face he saw through the smoke of the musketry staring with the glazed orbs of Death.

"I am afraid there is no cab on the stand in the square, sir," said the grey-headed porter, "but I'll see," and he stepped outside in the storm, and blew his whistle. Aubrey waited two or three minutes with ill-concealed impatience. "It's a dreadful night, sir," said the porter; "I thought it wasn't all over this afternoon. I don't think I ever saw the lightning more vivid. Hadn't you better wait, sir? There's sure to be a cab return just now."

"No, Williams," replied Aubrey, "I don't mind getting wet. I am anxious to get home. Mrs. Aubrey is so very nervous in a thunder-storm, especially at night."

The porter looked grave, and bowed respectfully. He had heard of Aubrey's delinquencies as a husband. How little do such men as Aubrey think who is taking stock of their offences. How ashamed would he have been, had he known that he was the

subject of discussion among those decorous flunkies, when off duty, or in their leisure moments at the club. Aubrey rushed out and rapidly pursued his way out of the square towards his house. A very few instants sufficed to soak him to the skin. There was something in the elemental strife which seemed in unison with his thoughts. It was a little penance he was paying for his neglect. He would tell Blanche how he had fallen asleep, and the eagerness with which he sought to repair his error. With what fond solicitude she would receive him, dear, dear girl!

“Hum!” quoth the old porter, as he scratched out Mr. Aubrey’s name in the hall day-book. “It’s no wife that’s taking him out like that. Folks like him can wait for cabs, when it’s wives that is waiting for them. It’s all very well for him to say so, and I don’t object to the crammer; for I am one of those that like to see a gentleman keep up appearances, but still for all that he don’t come over me. If his wife sees him atween this and four in the morning, I’ve not been hall-porter of this club these four-and-twenty year. She’s a nice lady is Mrs. Aubrey, too. Well, it is not always the nicest as is run after most, leastways by them that has the best right. Let’s see, there was one of them pink notes again this morning, scented till the place smelt like a doctor’s shop. What was it the butler told me yesterday he heard one of our gents say about Mrs. Aubrey? Oh! I know; he said she was gone blind. Well, she’d need to be blind to his goings on, poor thing; that’s all I have to say about it. I wonder some folks ain’t

afraid of being struck blind, or dead either for that matter, in such a storm as this, when they're deceiving their own flesh and blood; and going to church, too, on a Sunday, looking as solemn as undertakers. But their wives is as bad mostly, if all's true as I've heard spoken. There's that old Chalkstoneville visits these Aubreys, and the very sight of him ought to be enough to make a modest woman fly the country. I've been a married man these seven-and-twenty years; but if he was to come a sniffing and a coughing about my premises, me and the lady that owns me would be two in a jiffy, if she was to put up with it. But perhaps he don't mind it, seeing as the duke could come down heavy with damages. Such wretches don't ought to be husbands, and if I had my way they should never touch a penny of the money. I'd give it towards an asylum for some of them poor creatures walking about the streets to-night. It's mostly married men, and men that get married after all they've been and done, that brings girls to shame and want. The law wants altering, like a many other laws in England. Why, as I was saying to Mrs. Williams yesterday, don't some of these religious humbugs, that are so very anxious about the souls of the poor, that they wouldn't let them buy so much as a red-herring or a bunch of radishes on Sunday, give us poor club servants a holiday? Perhaps they think, by denying the lower classes, as they call them, everything in this world, they make them more sure of going to heaven. But the system don't work, in my opinion, according to their notion of compensation. It's more likely to end in neither rich nor poor being

saved; for if the rich begin by being selfish, they drive the poor into being vicious, and so the old gentleman gets the best of both sides." How long Mr. Williams's soliloquy might have lasted we cannot say, but just then another member of the club drove up in a Hansom to get his pink notes, besides which he wanted a cheque changed. At the great club of Civil and Religious Progress, they don't change cheques. Possibly the Committee consider it would be too tempting to some of the Irish members, whose sanguine temperament might lead them to overdraw their accounts, especially at a late hour of the evening. For the "Progress" boasted a large representation of those legislative patriots, who, some say, are ever seeking to exact that justice in personal instalments, which they are willing to forego for Ireland as a whole. Graft the vices of a trading Saxon community upon Celtic necessities and corruption, and the result is prejudicial to both nations alike. Nothing of their country remains to such men, but her eloquence without fire, and her brogue without grace. Well may the countrymen of Grattan, of Curran, and of Burke, desire the restoration of that local self-government which it was equally a blunder and a crime to disturb!

CHAPTER XI.

THE COBRA ON THE HEARTH-RUG.

But great and varied as was the genius of this gifted writer, that for which the nineteenth century will chiefly prize him was the geniality of his disposition and the overflowing tenderness of his heart. While scathing with his fiery satire the littlenesses and the basenesses with which he saw the circles he mixed in teem; while watering the flowers of the mock Eden of fashionable society with a can of vitriol, in which one might imagine that scorpions were dissolved, he has been known to arrest the progress of a whole party of his admirers in the street, to purchase the freedom of a lark or thrush from its small prison in the possession of a street urchin; to make a "circumbendibus," as he called it, to avoid crushing a snail, or to relieve the necessity of a beggar woman with a half-crown, which he would pleasantly borrow from the richest and meanest of the satellites who revolved around the mighty planet of his social career. He was emphatically a good and great creature in the best sense of the word.—*From the future Epitaph of Mr. Stingray, written by his bitterest enemy in life, to accompany a cartoon in the "Weekly Bosh."*

AS soon as Mr. Tops had made his horses comfortable after their rapid drive, and seen the "pheayton" extra-carefully cleaned and put into the coach-house, he repaired to the Maison Aubrey, in order, if possible, to obtain an interview with Susan, and acquaint her with the decided step he had taken. He knew that so long as Blanche needed her services, it was not very likely that Susan would be induced to leave her by marriage or anything else; and, to tell the

truth, Mr. Tops did not feel over comfortable at the thought of the separation that would ensue between him and his charmer.

It was quite nine o'clock before Susan came down, and she looked both sad and cross, when she did make her appearance. At first, she was evidently about to treat Tops to a little "trainin' for materimony," as he somewhat technically called it. But when he met her at the top of the kitchen stairs and implored her in his simple fashion to pull up and listen, for he had something very particular to say, Mrs. Susan condescended to lend him her best attention. The truth is, she saw at a glance that something extraordinary had happened, and flattered herself that at last the fidelity of Tops was shaken, either through the strength of his attachment to her, or owing to some new and flagrant misconduct of his master.

"Well," she said, "Mr. Tops, what have you got to say so very particular? I dare say it would have kept very well until to-morrow; or for ever, I dare say, if the truth was told, as far, at least, as I am concerned;" and she tossed her head scornfully. "But, perhaps, first you'll have the kindness to inform me where you left your brute of a master?"

"Certainly," replied Tops; "I left him at the club. Didn't Mr. Binsby give you the message I left for your missus?"

"And a pretty one it was, like the rest," replied Susan. "I wonder you're not ashamed to carry such messages. I'll tell you what, Mr. Tops, there'll soon be an end to this. That poor angel up-stairs is dying as fast as she can—dying of his neglect and unkind-

ness. Oh!" she cried, as a tremendous peal of thunder burst over the house, "I wonder he isn't afraid to be out such a night. Here, come up into the front drawing-room a moment, if your boots is clean. I shall be nearer to missus, if she should want me sudden. I wonder she hasn't rung before this; she's so mortal afraid of tempest."

"Susan," said Tops, slowly, when the pair had arrived in the pretty and elegant little room so often desecrated by the fashionable world; "I've been and done it. That's what I've got to say; now you knows it."

"What do you mean, Mr. Tops?" asked Susan. "Do you mean that you have given notice?"

"There ain't no notice about it," replied Tops. "Me and master had some words. I told him I didn't happrove exactly of his goings on, and the wheels of his temper took fire, that's hall; and I told him he could suit hisself."

"You won't leave for a month, at any rate?" inquired Susan, looking rather alarmed.

"To-morrow morning," replied Tops, "when I've fed and watered the 'osses, I takes leave of them and master for hever. I dessay old Binsby will settle hall lup between me and the guv'nor, as I don't want no words about it. He's been a very good master to me, and I never had a sitation as was more comfortable. I'm not one as'll say different, though we can't hit it together hany longer."

"Bless me, Tops," said Mrs. Susan, "I'd no idea you were going to be so sudden."

"Nor I neither," was the response. "But when

things breaks down, and nothink you can do can mend 'em, what's the use of looking on and making yourself unhappy? I never see a pair run better in harness than master and missus, hup to the last stage or two."

"Well," rejoined Susan, "though you don't express yourself very clearly, I know what you mean. Go on, and tell me who's caused the stage-coach, or family carriage, or whatever it is, to run so uneven."

"There never was a pair run better," resumed Tops, "nor them two creeturs for a couple of years and hupwards. And if this misfortin has overtook her, as it can't be doubted that it 'ave done, what of it? Them as is blind ain't so likely to shy, and requires a trifle more tender 'andling. That's where it is and what it is; and you couldn't say more, hif you was to talk for a fortnight."

"And so you're going to leave us so sudden?" said Susan, with some little indication of feeling, and a slight tremor in her not unmusical voice, which Mr. Binsby was once heard to say he had taken for the young madam's. "And it's all my doing. Don't shake your head, sir, like that. I know it is. It's owing to what I said this morning. Well, we shall see each other sometimes, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Tops, "if I don't accept a hoffer to take a lot of 'osses over to Rooshy."

"But you never will?" said Susan, showing more concern than she had yet indicated.

"I don't know," replied Tops; "it depends, you see."

"Upon what?" was the rejoinder.

"Upon the voice of my charmer," replied Tops; "whether she tells me to stop or not. That's where it is, you see."

"Really," said Susan, "you're talking hiroglyphics. "I didn't know charmers had anything to do with the plans of grooms. But I suppose it's some of your betting phraseology."

"I think it's you are trying to puzzle a feller," said Tops, "as is yourn, and yourn honly, if you'll honly say the word. And as I'm going to-morrow, I thought you would——" And here Tops fairly broke down, and his voice trembled with uneducated pathos, quite as effective in its way as the lisp of the most elegant votary of the little blind god.

"Well," said Susan, "I don't know but what—— We shall see each other sometimes, and I don't know but that some day, I may even consent to——"

"Be Mrs. Tops!" exclaimed that personage. "Hooray!" and he threw his hat up and caught it, and then seized Susan round the waist, and imprinted a chaste salute upon her lips.

"There, go along with you, that'll do! What a cap I shall have! What is the man about? One would think I was a 'oss, as you call it. But you really must mend your grammar."

"Grammar be blowed!" cried Tops; "you've got larning enough for a four-'oss coach, let alone two. We don't want larning in the public line. I can chalk hup the beer with crosses, and you can keep the books, and hedicate the babbies as much as you please. I'll give you your 'ead, Susan; I'll give you your 'ead, and I know you'll bowl along the turn-

pike-road of life like a—like a butterfly. I'll give you the box-seat, and what can any young 'ooman wish for more?"

"And when do you think you will return from Russia?" asked Susan very demurely, smoothing her apron.

"'Tain't likely I'd go now, if the Hemperor was to ax me hisself," was the answer. "Do you think I'm going to bolt clean off the course arter a start like this?"

"Upon my word," replied Susan, "you do snatch a body up quick. But I suppose I must have you, if it's only out of compassion. Have you heard of any situation near?"

Tops executed a series of nods and winks, ending with a face somewhat expressive of disgust. "I'm going to let myself down, Susan, very low; but a few score of them kisses of yourn, once or twice a week, will pull me hup agen all right. I've thought of living with hold Lawyer Grinderby, if master'll give me a note of reckymindation, which he can't very well be off doing of; it's unkimmon low, and hold Binsby will turn his nose hup as hif he smelt pison; but it's hall for your sake, Susan, and since you've said the word, I'll live with Old Scratch hisself to be anywheres near you."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Mrs. Susan; "but Mr. Grinderby is quite bad enough to show me that you really do care for me a little."

"I should reckon he were," rejoined Tops. "Why, he honly keeps two 'osses, and they're forty year hold, if they're a day."

"Forty years old, Mr. Tops?"

"Yes," he replied; "between 'em, I'll pound it; and a landau, as they calls it, which the springs is so stiff, and the leather so musty, that when it is opened, it puts me in mind of a grin on his own blessed parchment face."

"Well," said Susan, "I suppose I am in for it. But there is one great obstacle to our union;" and she accomplished a very sentimental sigh.

"Hobstacle?" eagerly inquired Tops in a fright. "Whatever do you mean?"

"The name!" answered Susan. "How ever can I be called 'Mrs. Tops?'"

"Go along with you. How can you skeer a feller like that?" asked the owner of that monosyllabic patronymic.

"It's the name that 'skeers' me, as you call it," she answered.

"I knowed a young man," observed Tops, "as lived at Epsom, as changed hisn to Plant-a-jenny; and if I don't hendanger the fammerly hestates, I ain't pertickler. Look here!" he added, pulling out a "Racing Calendar," "what do you say to 'Caracticus,' or 'Heclipse?' They was both on 'em winners."

"We'll see about it by-and-bye. But now that I've been so stupidly good-natured, and that master has discharged you, besides insulting your feelings, you won't mind telling me a little—just ever so little, of his goings on. Won't you, dear James?"

"Is that the voice of my Susan, as I hear a

tempting me to sech a hact? Say you're only a trying it on."

"Is this your confidence?" asked the lady. "Do you call this giving me the box-seat, or whatever nonsense you were talking just now?"

"But there ain't no seats yet," replied Tops; "the carridge ain't only jest hordered."

"Besides, you stupid fellow," resumed the insidious Susan, "do you think I would do missus, or master either for that, any harm?"

"That's not the pint," replied Tops.

"Which is?" she inquired.

"The honner of J. Tops, Esqvine, which he has never suffered to grow yaller yet, and don't mean to neither, which pison honly cleans, as it does real tops—the most beautiful hobject in Natur', Susan, when they air cleaned proper."

"Now, do go away," responded Susan; "I shall have missus here directly."

"Besides," added Tops; "say what you like of master, he halways knowed what 'osses is, and how things should be done. Come, don't be angry with a feller, when you know he can't help hisself;" and he again embraced the not unwilling object of his affections.

"Help himself?" returned Susan; "I think you do help yourself, and rather freely too. But since it is the last time you will have the opportunity in this house, I suppose I must put up with it. Good-night, Tops. I'm not angry."

"I'm as 'appy as a sand-boy, and wouldn't change

places with the lad as'll win the Derby, or the stud-groom of the Hemperor of Rooshy, though I'm going to live with that hold limb of Satan at Peckham, and drive them pair of twenty-year-hold hanimals of hisn with noses like the Duke of Wellington," cried Tops, as, with a variety of pantomimic gestures of an amorous description, he left the room.

"I can't say," soliloquised Susan, "but what I like him better for his obstinacy. There's the bell at last. Then master is returned;" and she went to the door and listened. "That's not his step," she said, after awhile; "who can it be at this time of night? A quarter to ten, I declare. I hope there's nothing wrong. Oh, lor!" she said, as Mr. Stingray made his appearance, "it's that old wretch of an author. Whatever can he want at this hour?"

"A very late call, Mrs. Susan, this," observed that individual, seating himself very deliberately, "and on such a night too, though I think the storm is breaking. I hear that Mr. Aubrey is out. I wanted most particularly to see him. Is he generally away from home at this hour?"

"No, sir," replied Susan, "that is, not always."

"Not always! hem!" observed the philosopher. "And your mistress is gone to bed unwell, is she?"

"No, not gone to bed. But she is not very well. Do you wish to see her, sir?" replied Susan.

"By no means," was the answer; "I will stay here. Don't go away, my dear; I don't bite. Your master and mistress ought to be very happy together?"

"Yes, sir," said Susan, "certainly."

"But it's very sad!" rejoined Stingray, pathetically.

"They say he knows everybody's business," quoth Susan to herself. "Perhaps I may learn all about master's goings on, if I'm only sharp enough. Did you want anything, sir," she asked aloud, "before I go to missus?"

Mr. Stingray beckoned her to him, and finding that she did not approach him, he walked close up to her. As he did so, possibly he caught sight of a form slowly entering the room, through the already open door. It was that of Blanche Aubrey. Noiselessly she felt her way, till she reached the table, and then she felt about, until she put her hand upon a tall high-backed chair, one of the two she had herself worked in embroidery with flowers and birds. In this she sat down unperceived by Susan, and with her face turned away from them.

"What was you pleased to say, sir?" asked Susan.

Blanche half raised herself, as she became aware that there were others in the room. Nay, she was on the very point of asking who it was, when Stingray said:

"What a pity it is, my dear, is it not——?"

"Yes, sir," replied Susan at a venture.

"To think that your master should neglect his wife for such a woman," rejoined Stingray. "So distressing! Some people think it will all come right, when he has sown his wild oats. But it's too late, I think, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," responded poor Susan, whose curiosity,

it must be owned, was far exceeded by her anxious dread.

"The doctors give no hope of Mrs. Aubrey's sight being restored—do they?" pursued Stingray.

"No, sir," uttered Susan.

"Poor thing! I felt sure of it. Never *is* restored in such cases. How fortunate could she always remain blind in another sense—I mean to your master's incomprehensible infatuation for that good-for-nothing hussy, with whom, doubtless, he is at this moment; and who, between ourselves, laughs at him all the time."

"There is, then——" exclaimed Susan, but checking herself, she said, merely; "yes, sir, indeed, it would be quite a mercy."

"Yes," continued Stingray, "there he lingers, chained to her triumphal car by the multiplicity of his rivals. Would you believe that a man could be so utterly absurd as to be jealous of such a woman?"

"Yes, no—that is——" replied Susan, "just what I was thinking of."

"And to think that the whole world is laughing at the farce, and that his wife should be the only one not to know it," continued Stingray. "Of course, you don't ever drop a hint, eh?"

"Me, sir?" replied Susan; "oh dear no, not for the universe."

"Very proper. I respect your principle, although a revelation might lead to good. Your mistress might bring him to his senses, threaten him with Sir Crossbill Crossbill. Besides, it is impossible that she should remain ignorant much longer—not very likely,

with such a rival as Kitty Dareall, whom I saw the day before yesterday riding your mistress's white Arab in the Park."

"Kitty Dareall! My mistress's white Arab!" stammered poor Susan. "Impossible! that is, yes, sir, of course, just so."

Mr. Stingray chuckled, and glowered through his spectacles, which looked like danger-signals on a railway line, as the light from Susan's candle fell upon them. "She actually didn't know a word about it," he said to himself. "It is too bad, isn't it?" he continued, addressing Susan rather more loudly than one would have thought necessary, considering how close they were to each other; but then Stingray was in the habit of speaking loudly. "He might do it more quietly, eh? Awful character, that Kitty! Of course, child, you know all about her. Can't tell you much you don't know." And the playful man chucked Mrs. Susan under the chin. "Oh, you wicked little creature!"

As Mrs. Susan often declared afterwards, she could have run a carving-fork into him at that moment for daring to lay so much as a finger on her; but at the time she saw fit to dissemble.

"Don't, if you please, sir," she said, with a curtsy. "I dare say I've heard a good deal more than I ought; but if you'd please to tell me a little more."

"Delightful human nature!" quoth Stingray, half aloud. "Well, my dear," he continued, "Kitty, whom, as you know, your master follows with a devotion worthy of a better object, as he doubtless

did your poor mistress before marriage; Kitty, of whom my foolish friend Aubrey is the greatest of the deluded victims and adorers—Kitty is a sleek tigress, a fascinating monster. You have heard how she knocks folks about like ninepins, and sets half the fashions in London; how she horsewhipped Lord Eppingforest, fought three policemen, and hoaxed the Archbishop of Middlesex, all in a single afternoon; and then appeared in the stage-box of the Thespis Theatre, looking as demure and glossy as if nothing had happened. Of course, you know that the Duke of Chalkstoneville, and Sir Harry Luckless, and half a score more, are the constant supporters and ministers of her extravagance and absurdity. It is, indeed, to be lamented that amid these your poor master, my friend Aubrey, should be the chief, as he is the most deluded of her victims. But, considering the example set him by others, perhaps he is not so much to blame as everybody says he is; and even now, could he be brought to a full sense of the wrong he is inflicting on his beautiful and accomplished wife, he might still, if not too late, make a tolerably exemplary and attentive husband; that is, as the world goes, my dear!"

Here Mr. Stingray helped himself to a considerable pinch of snuff; and Susan, no longer able to restrain herself, burst into a fit of crying.

"Why, how now?" exclaimed the great philanthropical satirist. "What have we here? You're not really crying, are you?"

"Not too late! not to blame!" cried Susan, repeating his words. "Oh, oh!"

"Dear me!" said Stingray, "considering you knew all before——"

"It is false. I knew nothing, save that my poor, dear mistress is neglected by a monster. Oh, oh!" rejoined Susan, still weeping. "And you," she added, turning sharply round upon Mr. Stingray, "are a brute to tell me."

"Hoity-toity!" said that gentleman. "We are in our tantrums. Well, as your master doesn't seem to be coming home quite so soon as your mistress expected him, I think I won't wait any longer. There, good-bye, my dear." And Mr. Stingray made a clumsy and ineffectual effort to pat her on the cheek, which was returned by a slap delivered with no little energy that narrowly missed his face, for which it was intended, and was delivered somewhere between his ear and the collar of his coat.

"So, so, pretty pussy!" he cried, "you're getting dangerous. Now, mind you don't repeat a word that I have told you to any one, though it is known to all the world, I say, all the world!"

With this cheerful piece of information Mr. Stingray put on his hat, and walked briskly to the door. "Mind and tell your master that I called, when he *does* return," he said. "I shall be at the Kemble Club to-morrow at two o'clock. It's about a dramatic charity I want to see him, and the arrangements for poor dear Bob Diltrees' funeral at Kensal Green."

With this Mr. Stingray kissed his huge paw, by way of adieu to Susan, and left the poison which he

had so carefully distilled into her ears to work as it might. Did he observe that other occupant of the room? Had he caught a glimpse of her white dress and that pale cameo-like face, gleaming brighter for its dark surrounding of tumultuous hair? Had he beheld her, as she glided across the apartment with her brief blind gaze turned a few moments towards them, ere she sank trembling and convulsed into the gorgeous high-backed chair? Had he seen her, as she rose up once, and once only, during his conversation with Susan, and showed a countenance so wan and ghastly, with the tips of her slender fingers pressed on her brow, like props to a fallen gable, like supports to a reeling brain? Had he seen that wild, distracted and appealing stare into vacancy? It is charity to suppose that he had not. It is a question that had better, for the credit of human nature, remain unsolved.

As his heavy tread was heard descending the stairs, Susan cast a glance of mingled hatred and relief at his departure after him.

"Yes," she said, "I should think your friends' burials were just what you delight in, you ill-omened old raven, you! It just suits you to see your ugly name in the newspapers along with a lot of humbugs like yourself. You never thought of helping the poor gentleman when he was alive, and now you make a rare pretence with your private theatricals and rubbish, just to make a fuss about your own names. I should like to know how much the widow and children, poor things, are likely to get out of it,

when you've had your dinners and speeches out of the fund, as you call it. I wonder whether Tops is gone. I should like to let him know what I've heard, and whether it is possible to keep it from coming to her." And the kind-hearted girl dried her eyes as well as she could, and hastily left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

NEVER ANY MORE.

A broken lute on a darkened floor,
A faded token of love long o'er,
The sound of a footstep to a door
Which once came often, but comes no more.

BLANCHE, who had sunk down in the chair with her throbbing temples pressed between her hands, remained for some minutes perfectly still and motionless. There was no sound to be heard in the room, save the monotonous ticking of the large French timepiece, though the heavy mutterings of the retreating storm ever and anon caused the windows to rattle slightly. Suddenly, with a sharp, piercing, but stifled cry, like that of a wounded creature in a brake, Blanche once more rose, and tottered a step or two from her chair, till she reached the table, which she grasped convulsively by the edge. There she stood awhile, with dilated nostrils and heaving bosom. Then she steadied herself, undid the bracelets from her still beautiful arms, and laid them carefully on the table. Her watch, set with brilliants, her chain, her magnificent rings, and even her diamond ear-rings followed. Listen! she is talking, with low and husky voice.

Hush! what is it she says? There is something in the tone of her voice that speaks of accents nearly numbered on this earth, of a life about to be cut short—her words sound like echoes from the ante-chamber of Death!

“I have had a terrible dream, Arthur, dearest Arthur!” she said. “Where are you? Ah, where? What was it that voice said, whose every accent burnt into my brain, until I could hear no more? My husband faithless? And with whom? Blind, blind, oh, so blind, and deserted, betrayed! On the anniversary of our wedding-day, too! He spoke so kindly when he went out. Can it be true, all which that dreadful man spoke about, and said that everybody knows, save one alone, myself? Yes, yes; I have felt it long, dreamt of it, all but known it, and now I know. What hour is it?” As she said this, she felt for the watch she had laid down on the table, and pressed a repeater. “Ten o’clock!” she continued. “Ten! His last gift, his last! It was a cruel gift; for it told me the hours of his absence. It will do so no more. When he comes home, he will be spared one sin, one falsehood more, and then he will be free—free as he could desire. What is that noise? ‘Tis the storm and the wind without.” She listened a few moments, and then continued: “There is no one here to witness my despair. He will come here and find the trinkets, the presents, with which he thought to lull the dark suspicions of my heart. But he will see the blind, neglected wife no more. He can give them to *her*. I left the cloak and hood, which I sometimes put on to watch for him, when it grows

cold late into the night, in the corner behind my harp. Let me get it, and then——” Whilst uttering these last words she felt her way with incredible skill and patience, until she found the articles of which she was in search, and then guided herself by the wall to the door. “The storm outside rages. And now, without a tear, I go forth blind into the night. But I cannot stay here any more—no, no, not here!”

She left the room-door ajar, and felt her way downstairs into the hall. Anon came the brief patter and dripping of the rain and the noise of the wheels of a passing cab, as she opened the street-door. Then the door closed harshly and reluctantly, as if conscious upon whom it shut. The noise of the closing door was heard by Susan as she came to the top of the kitchen-stairs, very red about her cheeks and eyes. She knew all the servants were below. “Who can it be?” she thought. Then the idea of thieves possessed her violently. So she ran down again, and called Mr. Binsby, who listened to her story with an air of patronising incredulity, which at any other time would have roused Susan’s ire. At last, he condescended to look through the rooms on the ground-floor, through motives of politeness; but in a manner which would have tempted any looker-on to wish that a thief might bolt from underneath the table between his legs and upset so much importance, which was, at least, equal to that of an acting member of the Court of Lieutenancy of the City of London about to sign the commission of an ensign of Volunteers. The page, however, at Mrs. Susan’s

suggestion, peeped under various articles of furniture, and the footman looked into the closets and cupboards. Mr. Binsby at length shook his head in token that further search was not to be made.

"I don't care," said Susan; "I am as certain that some one opened and shut that street-door as that I stand here; and whoever it was went out, or else they must have been in the hall directly after."

"The hats and coats is hall right," said Mr. Binsby, conclusively, and the search was ended.

Susan, still in dread, went up-stairs, accompanied by the under-housemaid, whom she requested to go with her. They looked into the drawing-room together, before going up to Mrs. Aubrey's room.

"Missus said she would lie down nearly two hours ago," said Susan, "but she can't be asleep; at least, if she is, it's the first time I've known her do such a thing, while that cruel brute stayed out as usual. But either she or some one has been here; for I shut the drawing-room door, after old Stingray had gone, I'm as sure as—— Lor! whatever's this?"

The two girls had entered the drawing-room together, and Susan's eye had fallen upon the little heap of jewellery on the table. For a moment she appeared stupefied, and then rushed out of the room and darted up-stairs. She came down again pale and breathless.

"The door! the door!" she gasped, and then ran to the top of the stairs, and shrieked out, "Missus! Mrs. Aubrey! missus! She's run away—gone such a night as this! and she blind, too! Here, don't stand staring there," she cried to the housemaid;

"run down and tell them. We must all go after her."

Then she rang the bell furiously, while the housemaid hurried down-stairs.

"Whatever can be the meaning of this? Ah!" she cried, "if she heard what that old wretch was saying. He spoke loud enough, and the door was open. Oh, my dear mistress, I shall never see her any more!"

So saying, she ran down-stairs, in order to send all the domestics in pursuit, and found Mr. Binsby looking up from his chair with the same look of incredulity with which he had listened to the story of the street-door.

"Have you looked in her bed as well as elsewhere?" he inquired, putting down his newspaper, and looking over his spectacles at Susan, as she entered with a face and manner which caused him to drop his jaw slightly, and finish his sentence more abruptly than he would otherwise have done.

"Make haste! all of you, and go after her!" screamed Susan. "I tell you she's gone out, and such a night as this, too. It was her I heard shut the street-door. She's heard—Mr. Stingray talking—she's gone out—I shouldn't wonder—to destroy—herself. Oh! my dear, dear mistress, we shall never see her any more!"

And the faithful creature wrung her hands in an agony of tears. A change came over Mr. Binsby's whole deportment. His face grew so fixed and serious, that as the page was after heard to say, "It was horful to see him. He looked just like 'Amlet in

the play, honly hever so much holder, you know." Then Mr. Binsby lost his self-possession, and grasping a candlestick, although the lamps outside were all lighted—a circumstance which he was often wont to narrate afterwards—he hurried up-stairs, followed by them all, and opened the street-door. All was silent outside. The pale blue lightning gleamed on the wet pavement, and lit up the architectural varieties of the neighbouring houses, converting shadows into lights, and lights into shadows, showing a desperate tom-cat springing with arched back across the road outward or homeward bound on the first opportunity after the storm, and revealing the shining oilskin cape and ungainly form of a distant policeman turning a corner. But nothing else was to be seen.

"Here!" said Binsby, with energy; for, strange to say, he had surrendered his incredulity instantaneously, and accepted Mrs. Aubrey's departure as a fact on Susan's last revelation. "Here, my boy," addressing the page, "you go with them," pointing to the cook and housemaid, "that way; and you," he said to Susan and the footman, "foller hup the street. I'll go and speak to the perlice. You two," he said, to the scullery-maid and second housemaid, "stop here. Some one must be left in the 'ouse."

No one would have recognised Binsby at that moment. He looked a third less large, and all his importance had vanished. For he dearly loved and respected his young lady; though he did say some weeks after, that if she had been in a different posi-

tion before marriage, such a dreadful thing couldn't have happened.

"And why so?" asked Mr. Binsby. "The reasons is hobvious. If people of rank was to give in to jealousy, there'd be an end to all their marridges."

But Mr. Binsby, at least for one night of his life, neither sought the repose needed by his weighty frame, nor uttered a single pompous or unnecessary phrase.

The whole party had scarcely disappeared on their search, and the plaintive cries of Susan had only just become inaudible from the steps of the Maison Aubrey, as she looked in search of a white, prostrate form down the gloom of a neighbouring street, when some one hurriedly opened, with a latch-key, the door which they had just quitted, and bounded up the familiar steps into the brilliantly illuminated drawing-room of his tasteful and luxurious home.

"Blanche! dearest Blanche!" cried that ever-welcome intruder—before his eyes grew accustomed to the light, and he saw that he addressed only the inanimate furniture of the room—"forgive me this last unkindness, and I will never, never come home late any more."

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR SENSATION-HEADER.

The Republic of Venice had its one Bridge of Sighs; the limited monarchy of Great Britain its half-dozen, and that in its chief metropolis alone.

IT may seem impossible that Blanche could have got clear away from the house that night, but she did so in a very short space of time. Had she been asked how, she could not have told; nor did she ever remember distinctly how the first half-hour passed. She fell repeatedly, and heard once or twice, without regarding them, the hoarse challenges of the drivers of vehicles, probably cabs, from which she must have had a narrow escape. The first thing of which she had a distinct recollection, was the voices of children surrounding her, probably in the entrance of some narrow court or alley, where the neglected little wretches were playing, if it could be called play, at that hour, while their parents, if they had any, were possibly thieving, or perhaps working hard and late to eke out their miserable existence. She heard a girl's voice calling her "lady," and pleading hard for a halfpenny.

"I will give you this," said Blanche, with hollow accents, feeling in her pocket for some loose silver which she happened to have there, "if you will lead me to Westminster Bridge; for I am blind."

"Let me go! No, I'll take the lady! I knows the shortest way! Get out, will yer! I was fust!" and similar cries surrounded her on all sides.

"It's me as spoke first," said the voice that first begged from her; "I'm Nelly Brown; father's dead and mother's out charing. Please, I know the way."

"Give me your hand," replied Blanche, in husky tones; "you shall go with me and guide me!"

The news soon spread that a young lady, "drest, oh, so beautiful!" and blind as Sal Tomkins's old man, who had a board hung round his neck, and a little dog to lead him, and who earned an excellent living, with the connivance of the police, somewhere in the West-end, had chartered little Nelly Brown to lead her to Westminster Bridge: the consequence was, that for some time Blanche and her guide were followed by a crowd of small children, asking the former to chuck a ha'penny, and jeering the latter unmercifully; but Blanche heeded them not. Ere long, however, the appearance of a policeman flustered the ragged tribe of young Volscians; and the pair pursued their way unmolested, at least by the juvenile gathering of little ragamuffins which at first dogged their steps. More than one policeman hesitated on his beat, as if irresolute whether or not to challenge their future progress. But these apparently saw nothing to justify such a proceeding, and cer-

tainly there was not. Twice they were subjected to the attentions of amatory prowlers, struck by the figure, dress, and beauty of as much of the countenance of Blanche as they could discern. But each gallant, after a look at the fixed stare and strange expression of the mysterious lady, thus led along by a dirty beggar-girl, slackened his pace and dropped off; nor was Blanche in the slightest degree aware of the fact of their scrutiny or baffled chase. A hag-like old woman hung on their skirts some time with villainous intent of plunder; but as Blanche had left every object of jewellery behind her, the prospect did not seem sufficiently tempting to induce perseverance in such nefarious project or attempt. A drunken navvy did actually seize her in his arms, when they neared the bridge just opposite the venerable old Abbey, which loomed grand and indistinct against the dark pile of thunder-clouds beyond. The beggar child beat him with her small dirty paws, and cried "Let the blind lady alone!" and he relinquished his hold and staggered away muttering to a companion, "I say, Bill, here's a go. S'elp me ——! I got hold of a blind woman for a fancy gal."

At length they were on the bridge.

"Lead me to the side," said Blanche, "and let me lean upon the parapet. I can hear the water beneath. Tell me exactly where we are." The child described to her as well as she could where they stood. It was on the Houses of Parliament side, just clear of the terrace. The bridge was very silent and nearly deserted. In fact the other end was completely blocked by works

and scaffolding, and the passage of vehicles was entirely interrupted. Every now and then a distant flash of lightning illuminated the river over towards Lambeth and Chelsea. "Thank you!" said Blanche very softly to the girl, "that will do. Here is your reward. Run away home and make yourself happy with it. It is honestly earned. Good night!"

The girl paused, and looked at the money under a lamp. She had never had so much; and she longed to run home and acquaint her mother, who must be back, she thought, by that time. But she did not like to leave that kind afflicted lady on the bridge alone. Young as she was, there was something which alarmed her instincts.

"I can stay, lady, if you like, and take you back," she said; "mother don't mind my being out late, and Betsy Staples will tell her what I'm a doing of."

"I am not going back," said Blanche. "Go home as fast as you can; I assure you I have no need of you more. Take the money to your mother. Farewell!"

The child eyed Blanche with a puzzled expression; but she was too young to appreciate the situation, and the temptation to get home with the money was great. So she curtsied in the dark to her blind charge, and said "Good-bye, kind lady;" and started off at a rapid walk, which, after she had ineffectually looked round to see what Blanche was doing once or twice, soon quickened into a run.

Blanche Aubrey stood in the shadow of the great filagree-palace of British misrepresentation, as Big

Ben dismally told out eleven o'clock. She could not see

Where the lights quiver
So far in the river
From garret to basement ;

but she could hear the rush of the broad and bubbling river, and her full heart and burning head throbbed to be at rest. The low parapet was so tempting ; besides she *could* not live. She had no home left, no husband, no wish, no world. She was impatient to be released from trouble and pain ; and to free him from a clog, a burden. She had lived only for him ; and to her he was more than dead. All the principal scenes of her life crowded through her troubled brain, and with them some of the most trivial. She thought of a dress she had not finished, and what would become of it, and whether it would be trimmed in anything like the fashion she had designed. She thought of a walk by the river-side when she was a child, and made chains out of dandelion stalks. She thought of a white hat which her husband had worn the first time she ever saw him, and how becoming it was to his clear, dark complexion. But the predominating thought was extreme weariness and disgust of everything. She had once dreamt that she was drowned, and it was not painful. On the contrary, the water bore her along with a delicious murmur, between fragrant and flowery banks unto a broad expanse of ocean, when gradually recollection was lost, and then she awoke. She longed to dream that dream over again. And then her lips moved mechanically in a simple prayer. Poor creature ! on

the brink of that fearful crime, she dared to address the Creator on behalf of another, and that other, him who had so cruelly wronged her, and who was now to be to her no more.

Strange to say no resentment mingled that night with her feelings towards Aubrey. She seemed to accept everything as a natural result of her calamity. But while she still stands there, pausing but not irresolute, ere the round black guilty world slips globe-like from her numb feet, and the last fatal plunge into eternal gloom is taken, we must beg our readers to observe a strange, dim figure of a man, at no great distance from her, and to listen to a very different soliloquy from a very different style of human being, before he became conscious of the propinquity of Blanche Aubrey on the bridge.

This mortal, whoever he was, had approached within a few paces, coming from the Lambeth side of the water, just as the little girl disappeared in the dark on the other side.

"Blest if that 'ere lightnin' ain't put my pipe out," he remarked aloud to himself, as he hitched round a piece of sacking from his shoulders, and banged it a few times against the stone parapet in order to get rid of the superfluous wet. "Reyther a damp night this for a hout-door lodger vith the key of the street. Vell, I suppose Sir Richard Mayne know'd I was a goin' to sleep here to night, and so he has'ad a barrier put up this werry arternoon at t'other end of the bridge, that I may not be vakened by the homni-buses. Werry kind and thoughtful that of the Chief Commissioner of the 'Bobbies.' Now, here's a piece

o' scaffoldin' werry 'andy. I likes my boards dry, and as for softness, vy ain't I myself 'downy'? Says I to myself, 'Cove! don't be a wictim to too much luxury; you 'ad tripe and inions for supper last night, and was cut down this mornin' at seven in a fourpenny lodgin'. Your feller-citizens is werry considyrate of you, Downy; they know too much sleep ain't good for your constitooshun. So down-you comes with a run on the floor, and gets turned hall at vunce into a parlour-boarder. I pities them folks in feather-beds as is afraid o' lightnin'. Let's consider my kimmershal transackshuns a little, afore I retires for the night. I opened and shut seven cabs this arternoon, and 'eld vun 'oss, and showed vun gent the vay to the Cross, and collered honly three-pence ha'penny. If it hadn't been for a good-natured cabby, I should have gone vithout a blessed drain of anythink this blessed night. I'll jest turn it afore I sees another Bobby. I never could sleep comfortable in the cage, and as for 'movin' on,' the Cove ain't hambitious, and he don't feel novays hanxious to himmortalise himself by diskiverin' the secret of perpetival motion."

So saying, he laid himself very carefully down on some covered boarding, supplied by an unfinished workman's hut.

As he did so, a policeman came by and turned his bulls'-eye full upon him. The Downy seemed at first doubtful whether he should counterfeit sleep or not. But on second thoughts, he opened his eyes, nodded, and executed an unmistakable wink.

“ Good night !” he said, “ I hopes Mrs. Robert is vell, and the fammerly.”

The only reply made by the “ officer ” whom he thus addressed, was a shake of the head, as he continued on his dreary beat.

“ Now that’s wot I calls kind,” remarked the Downy to himself, “ and deserves a large lump o’ cold meat at the very next airey he comes to.” With that he partly rose up, in order to shift his position and make himself more “ comfortable,” before addressing himself to sleep. At that very moment a distant flash of lightning revealed to his astonished gaze a tall white female form leaning over the parapet about thirty yards off, on the other side of the bridge. The Cove was not superstitious—he was not versed in the supernatural lore of his country; and therefore he did not for a moment think that it was a ghost that he had seen, however spectral and apparition-like the figure of Blanche appeared.

“ Holloa !” he said, “ another of them poor creeturs as is tired of a merry life. I dessay it would be a mercy not to hinterfere vith her, but I can’t see it done and sleep here ’appy. No, I can’t see it done; nor wot’s more, I von’t, not if I can ’elp it.” And so saying, he stealthily approached Blanche, until he could hear her passionate murmurs of distress.

“ The poor child led me faithfully,” she said. “ The money I gave her will make some poor creatures happy. All the treasures of the world could not reconcile me to life. How, as I came here, I wished some vehicle would crush me, and spare me the commission of this crime !”

“ Ah! there it is!” whispered the Downy, “ jest wot I thought, crime and soocide. I vish I’d got some of them as caused it here.”

“ I have not been very wicked,” continued Blanche ; “ unless it was in loving him so dearly and so well. I noticed how low this parapet is, as I passed here blithe and happy, just before my poor sight fled, and he ceased to love me. Oh, Arthur, Arthur! I forgive you!”

“ I vish I’d the ’andling of him, that’s all,” muttered the Downy.

“ Oh, Arthur!” she resumed, “ we shall meet again. Merciful Spirit of Eternal Love, forgive me, as I do him! The water rushes beneath. I hear it plashing. The distant thunder sounds my knell. The unseen lightnings have scorched my brain, which all the rain could not cool or moisten. Now, now! Farewell, world! Arthur! Love! Forgive him, Heaven!”

“ Not if I knows it, young ’ooman!” shouted the Downy, making a dash at her. But he was a moment too late. She had thrown herself over the parapet.

She was gone! So desperate was the bound he had made to reach her, that he narrowly escaped pitching headforemost over the parapet, and, as it was, he fell forward sprawling upon it; for the next half second grasping the wet stone with his hands and arms to save himself. In a moment he recovered his balance, and with a hoarse shout for help, he dashed round to the steps of the bridge, which fortunately were not very far.

“ Help ! A woman over the bridge ! ” he shouted once again, ere he flung his coat off and plunged into the stream. As we have said, he was a strong and bold swimmer, accustomed to emergencies such as the present one ; and well for him was it that he was so, besides being gifted with an eye keen as that of hawk or hound. The tide bore Blanche up awhile ; and her white dress rendered her floating form visible to the Downy’s keen and practised sight. But it was long before he reached her, and then came the terrible struggle to get back. Fortunately, there were several floating rafts and barges moored along the terrace-side, and two or three steamers with chains hung round. Meanwhile, a boatman, who expected an early fare, a gentleman in training whom he rowed down to Chelsea to get into his outrigger every morning, and who had accordingly moored his boat somewhere near the bridge, had got alarmed about its safety at high-water, and had come down to look after it just then. He speedily got in and rowed towards the struggling pair, amid the acclamations of the three or four persons already congregated on the bridge.

“ He’s got ’em safe enough,” cried one of them. “ I see ’em by the lightning, quite plain. Down there, all of you, to the right by the steps.”

It had already recommenced raining heavily, which accounted for so few being on the bridge, where the sole person remaining near the scene of the catastrophe was a benighted orange-girl, who looked with less excitement and eagerness than might have been expected, over the parapet, at that portion of what

was going on beneath, which the darkness allowed to be seen. As she looked, she rested on the parapet her basket of swelled oranges, which had remained unsold, possibly on account of the rainy and tempestuous day. While thus employed, a party of four persons, two male, and two female, approached her. They had come from the Surrey side of the water, but were fashionably dressed.

“Only think,” said one of the party to another, a lady, as they approached the orange-girl. “Only think of there being no cab to be got, and such a night, too. It’s enough to give one bwonchitis, or diptheywia.”

“And such a low part of the town to pass through!” said the lady. “I never was so frightened. And there’s Miss Dareall, as usual, making fun of it all. What spirits and courage that girl has!”

“Yaas,” replied Mr. Swellingham, for that was the worthy’s name; “she goes through life like a steeple-chase. I own I can’t keep up with her.”

Here, with the prevailing idea which besets street vendors, that every one must be in want under all or any circumstances of the article which they may happen to sell, the orange-girl slung round her basket, and addressed them with the usual drawl.

“Any oranges, fine St. Mikils, two a penny, sir: won’t you buy any, ma’am?”

“I say,” quoth Mr. Swellingham, “what’s the wow? I heard a shout as if some one was being dwowned.”

“What is the matter, young woman?” said the elder of the two ladies to the girl.

"It's a girl they're a trying to get out of the water," replied that individual. "Do buy some oranges; they're only two a penny."

"How howwid!" cried Swellingham; "but we weally can't help her, 'pon honour. Can we?"

"Where? Where is the poor creature?" cried the younger lady, whom we may as well inform our readers at once was no other than Miss Kate Dareall, on her way home from the Surrey Theatre. The orange-girl pointed with her finger towards the steps.

"There, by this time, if they've got her. But I don't think she'd a chance; let alone the likelihood of her having struck agen somethink in the fall."

Miss Dareall did not wait for her to finish, but ran on towards the steps, followed closely by Sir Harry Luckless, the fourth of the party.

"Do, kind lady, buy some oranges, they're fourteen for sixpence. Do ma'am! I haven't sold one to-day," continued the persevering huckster, addressing the remaining lady.

"Go away, creature, you'll soil my dress!" cried Miss Ada Montmorency, of the Hesperides corps de ballet, whose mother had been, up to within the previous eight years, a priestess of the *soi-disant* "real St. Michael," herself.

"A curse on you with your finery!" cried the girl, who was really a good-looking specimen of her class. "My oranges are cleaner than your hands, ay, or heart either, I'll warrant. It's the likes of you that makes poor creaturs drown theirselves."

Mr. Swellingham raised his attenuated umbrella.

Let us do him justice, it was not to strike; for he was a good-hearted fellow enough; but the girl interpreted the movement differently.

"You hit me?" she cried, "you brute; I'll scratch your eyes out."

Mr. Swellingham prudently declined the combat; and hurried on with his fair convoy as quickly as he could, pursued by a volley of abuse from the girl who followed close on their steps.

"Police! police!" cried the Montmorency.

"Cab! cab!" shouted Swellingham. "Wherever can Sir Harry and that madcap girl have got to?"

"Depend upon it," said the ballerina, "they have not waited for us, or perhaps they have secured a cab at the stand by the House of Commons there, and are waiting for us. Do pray let us hasten on."

And the twain did accordingly hasten on, passing the steps down which Miss Dareall, followed by Sir Harry, had run; the latter pair just arriving when the boatman, assisted by the four or five persons who had found their way thither, was in the act of lifting the form of the insensible Blanche out of his skiff, while the dripping Downy stood shaking himself on the stair like a lean and famished Newfoundland dog, whose wet coat clinging close to his ribs, shows the real attenuation of his shape.

"Is she saved?" cried the actress. "Oh! only tell me that the poor creature breathes." And she shuddered as the leaden-hued water swirled through the dusky piles, and came close, with a lapping, eager sound, to her feet, as she stood gazing at the now

ascending group, while they bore their inanimate burden to the first platform of the stairs.

"She's safe enough to come round," answered the Downy, who was too exhausted to assist them as yet; "that is," he added, "if she ain't took pison as well, as vun on 'em did vunce as I saved from drowndin' afore."

"Believe me, my brave fellow," said Sir Harry, "you shall be handsomely rewarded for this."

"So I'm allers told," replied the Downy, drily; if such a term could possibly be applied to him at that moment. "But, mind yer, I don't look for more than a kivarten of gin, and may be a trifle for baccy. Somehow I generally saves them as has no money for theirselves, and vot's more, don't thank no vun for a doin' of it. But the Downy Cove ain't noways pertikler to a trifle. As for the duckin', I've been vet enough these four hours, and this is honly goin' into it a little in the wholesale line, arter takin' of it in instalments. As to the Royal Humane Society's gold medal, I may be perwailed upon to accept that ven I gets it, along with the freedom of the City of London. Meanwhile, I ain't a goin' to ax the Lord Mayor to dinner to meet the Prince of Wales, until I gets my new dinin'-room furnitur French polished, and all the fammerly plate back from Hadmiral Poppem, my venerable and respected huncle."

During this speech, the others had been busy in chafing the hands of Blanche, and endeavouring to restore animation to her insensible frame. Among these Kate Dareall was the most active and sensible in her proceedings. "Look, Harry!" she cried,

"she breathes! she moves! Never mind her wet cloak. Leave it for one of these poor creatures. I will see that she has all that she wants. She looks like a lady. But the story is plain enough. There is not a ring or ornament about her. Get a cab handy, some one. Take off your great-coat, Harry. Thank you, that will do. I will reward all handsomely. Stop! I will do it now. Here, my good man," she said to the boatman, "take this five-pound note, you deserve it. And here is a sovereign a piece for the rest."

One of the party quickly ran up for the cab.

"Look, Harry," continued Miss Dareall, "how beautiful she is!" And she pointed to the alabaster face that lay pillowed on her knee, while the long dark tresses of the rescued sufferer swept the dank and dripping stairs. "Help me to wring her long hair," she continued.

"Great Heaven!" cried Sir Harry, turning as pale as Blanche herself. "What do I see?" And he staggered back, and possibly might have fallen into the water, had it not been for the ever-ready Downey, who had finished his brief toilet, and already performed a little double-shuffle on the stairs, to restore the circulation of the vital fluid within.

"Hold hup, guv'nor," he shouted, "hunless you're good for a swim. Blest if I could save any more of yer this turn; no, not if you was to hoffer to set me up in the public line, and give me the deckerashun of the Bath."

Sir Harry stared about him wildly; and grasping Miss Dareall by the arm, hoarsely muttered some-

thing in her ear, which caused that young lady to let Blanche's head fall from her knee upon the sharp edge of the granite stair.

"It is Mrs. Aubrey!" were his words. "God in heaven! What can have happened. What has done this?"

"The actress uttered a single exclamation of surprise; and then instantly regaining her self-possession, "Hush, hush! Calm yourself, Harry!" she whispered. "Not a word! not a word!"

At that instant the man who had run for the cab returned to say that one awaited them above.

Fortunately for the success of Miss Dareall's friendly design, the few persons present, besides the boatman, and the Downy, and themselves, were all of the humblest class of persons, and none had the desire to busy themselves more than was needed, or, now that they were recompensed so generously, to remain upon the scene at all.

"Here you brave man," said Kitty, addressing the Downy, "where do you live? Is it anywhere near here?"

"Live?" replied that individual; "uncommon handy, to be sure. Vestminster Bridge scaffoldin' is vere I hangs out at present. Wery harrystocratic neighbourhood, spacious premises, and well wentilated too. It's no use writin'. There ain't no number on the door at present."

"I see," said Miss Dareall; "I might have known, had I thought a moment. Then you can come with us."

The Downy nodded his acquiescence.

“Can you help me to bear her up these stairs? There! there! gently—that’s right; run and open the cab-door ready for us, will you, Harry, if you’re not utterly dumbfounded? Not to be wondered at, if he is,” she said, as Sir Harry mechanically sprung forward to obey her. “There, there—so, gently—gently,” and then the party quickly ascended the stairs. Under the guidance of the actress, Blanche was safely placed inside, having once or twice opened her blind eyes with a dreary, languid stare; and Sir Harry and Miss Dareall supported her between them, while the Downy was instructed to mount the box, and stop at a public-house at a sufficient distance from the scene; for the twofold purpose of avoiding the mention of any address, and of getting some restorative both for Blanche and her preserver, a proposition to which the latter had probably as little objection as if he had been listening to a two hours’ sermon on temperance on the hottest Sunday in the State of Maine.

The cab had just turned the corner, and the four bystanders were wending their way over the bridge to the nearest public on their side of the water, near “Hashley’s Theáyer,” as they termed that place, long sacred to equestrian delight, when the poor orange-girl came shuffling back, after her vain pursuit of Swellingham and the Montmorency, to learn what had come of the drowned woman; for such she had decided she must be. At the top of the steps she saw something lying. It was Blanche’s

cloak, which Sir Harry had taken possession of, and let fall in his agitation, as he well might.

She stooped and picked it up, and then laying her tray on the ground, commenced folding it up. "Poor creetur," she said to herself. "It ain't no more use to her, whoever she was."

"Holloa!" cried the active and intelligent officer, who had been on a little visit in his turn to a public, to get his accustomed half pint with a drop of something warm. "What are you doing of there?" and he snatched the mantle roughly from her hands. "Who have you been a robbin' of, eh?"

"There's a woman been and drowned herself," said the girl. "Indeed, sir, I didn't steal it. I picked it up just here."

"Picked it up, did yer?" shouted the "active and intelligent officer." "A likely tale! A woman drowning is there? Here! help! fire! murder! thieves! Here!" and he sprung his rattle, which speedily brought a brace of confrères to his side, besides a little mob of the unwashed, or rather, to speak more correctly, the washed, as it happened that stormy afternoon and night.

"Here, Bill! she says there's a woman drowning somewheres. I knows her well enough. She's been a begging here all the week."

And with that he dealt a kick to her basket, which sent her oranges rolling into the mud of the street, and down the bridge-stairs, where they were speedily chased by sundry of the pauper population of our merry island home.

"A drowned woman, eh? Come along to the

station, my beauty, and I'll give you a night's lodging for nothing."

"Oh, pray, sir, let me go!" shrieked the girl.

"What! you *won't* come, won't yer? then I'll make yer," was the answer. "What! priggish a drowned woman's clothes by your own confession, which is wanted for hevidence of felony? I'll lock yer up, that's what I will. Here, Bill, lend a hand!"

In vain did the luckless orange-girl fight and struggle. With torn hair and dress, and shoulders pinched black and blue by the fierce grasp of three stout policemen, and, we regret to say, not without a severe blow or two on her bare head administered by a zealous young Irishman recently affiliated to the Force, she was borne off, with cries and resistance growing fainter and fainter, until she was finally flung, wet, muddy, bleeding, and nearly senseless, in the cold and reeking cell, where half a dozen "unfortunates," whose chief crime was abject poverty, and homeless want, were already incarcerated before her, awaiting the solemn farce of beadledom in the morning, when the comfortable Rhadamanthus of the day should have breakfasted, and be ready to furnish the newest legal paraphrase of the story of Dives and Lazarus to the full satisfaction of a Christian land.

Reader! Is this sketch exaggerated? No, it is far below the average cruelty of such nightly events. The victim should have had a sickly baby in her arms, and three more vainly awaiting her return home to their squalid den in helpless hunger and dirty tears. She should not even have suggested the appropriation of anything not her own, but have had

nothing save the rags on herself and child, and a copper coin in her clammy clutch dropped into her lap by some passing stranger unsolicited even by an imploring look. Then the picture would have been more perfect, we own; and the wisdom and mercy of the Court might have manifested itself either by giving her "a month," or discharging her, according to the temper and digestion of the "worthy magistrate," or the zeal of the "active and intelligent officers," who had marked her as their own.

Again the ponderous bridge was cleared of the actors in the second little sensation scene which had enlivened its monotony that night. But the news had somehow spread that a woman had jumped over, or been pushed into the water, and a British crowd quickly assembled, as only a British crowd can.

"There she is!" cried one. "I see her floating ever so far up. She's 'arf way to Vauxhall by now. I tell you I see her plain, just opposite that chimbley."

The excitement became great; and so remarkable were some of its consequences, that various trifles were magnetically affected by it, including a snuff-box, three pocket-handkerchiefs, and a purse containing one pound ten shillings, so as to cause them to vacate their owners' pockets in a most remarkable way, and be transferred to those of two or three of the crowd apparently most interested in the fate of the drowning person "half way to Vauxhall." And not a policeman was in sight! What is that chorus borne along by the wind? "We won't go home till morning till daylight doth appear." Presently, a dozen young

fellows came along, arm-in-arm and in line, singing, shouting, and yelling at the top of their discordant voices; they bonnetted, abused, and insulted every one, especially females, in their path. They saw a garotted man lying insensible in the street, but as one of the party suggested that he was "drunk, —— drunk, by ——!" and appeared quite capable of forming a correct judgment, no one attempted to ascertain its correctness. Presently Big Ben boomed forth the midnight hour, and the bridge again became silent, and the river rushed back towards ocean, and the shadowy panorama twinkled with innumerable lights, and the stars shone out in the sky cleared from the last driving storm-cloud, and mingled with the earthly gleams reflected in the broad bosom of the river, as the true mingles with the false.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FEELINGS OF THE FIRM.

He shall be as benevolent as a lawyer who sits nursing his leg and listening to the tales of one whom his own client oppresses. You shall touch his feelings as readily as a baby fumbling a cocoa-nut extracts thence the milk of sustenance. Your freedom shall be like that of a rabbit in the cage of a serpent, before he is ready for the act of deglutition. You shall hardly stir the devil within him to malice, so surely has he marked you for his prey.

It was Monday morning in Webb's Fields, and the Law might be said to be generally refreshed and renovated by its varied observance of the Sabbath-day. Messrs. Grinderby and Cousens sat, three years older in legal practice and worldly experience, in their chambers in Spider-court. The former was a little more troubled with dyspepsia; the latter suffered from a slightly increased periodical attack of king's evil, a weak chest, and corns. His bootmaker had philanthropically forgotten to make the necessary arrangement for them on his last, when furnishing him with his latest supply of inevitable patent leathers. After all, there is a great unseen compensating power ever at work in human affairs. A ruined litigant had just left their office in perfect health. The ways of Providence none can dare to

arraign, who believes in another world; but even here below the golden cup of prosperity does not always overbrim with sweetness; the iron ladle of poverty sometimes assuages a wholesome and honest thirst. Mr. Grinderby's eldest son could scarcely be termed his hope, and occasioned him a great deal of disquietude. He did not accommodate himself to his father's views and ways of life; a circumstance which did not emanate from an ungrateful disposition or a barren heart. Mr. Cousens had bestowed his affections, such as they were, upon a worthless and disreputable woman, whom he had cleverly tempted, as he thought, from her allegiance to his own chief associate and "friend," whereas she cared for neither, and had long since bestowed her liking upon a grocer's apprentice in Tottenham Court-road, unknown to both. The friend had displayed a great deal of very inconvenient jealousy; and the knowing Phil had merely been made use of at a moment, when she could no longer hope to divert suspicion from her misdeeds, and avoid being thrown upon her own resources and the doubtful chivalry of the gay young dispenser of figs. Moreover, delightful to relate, the astute Mr. Cousens was actually so far infatuated by this Casino-frequenting Dalilah of thirty, that he was on the point of entering secretly into the holy bonds of matrimony with her. Yes, she was on the point of making an honest man of him at last. All this may have been exciting as it was strange; but it did not tend to happiness. Phil laughed as usual, "but not merry." Moreover, the circumstances under which the *éclaircissement* took

place between Mr. Cousens and his injured friend were not of a proud and gratifying character. The friend was a West-end client of the firm, and up to a certain period Mr. Cousens had been an upright counsellor, so far as to lose no occasion to influence his "fidus Achates" against an extravagant expenditure on the lady in question. All at once, his tone changed, and as he was general referee and arbitrator of their frequent quarrels, Orestes took advantage of the situation to urge Pylades, to the great surprise of the latter, to bestow a round sum of money down upon the lady, and act generously in the matter. Unfortunately, Orestes' reasons for giving this advice were hardly so plausible as they ought to have been, in order to carry conviction to the bosom of Pylades.

"If I were you, old fellow," said the former, "I'd settle it one way or another. She's so fond of you, you see, that she can't bear you to show a want of confidence in her. 'Let him only treat me as a woman ought to be treated,' she said to me last Wednesday, 'and he'll soon see whether I care for him or not.' And it's worth trying, in my opinion," added Phil, "with a woman like that. She has such a high spirit, you see."

"True," returned Pylades, who had especial reason to know it, dating no further back than that morning; "and what would you advise me to do?"

"Give her one thousand pounds down and the furniture of the house in the Grove," replied Phil, cheerily and decisively. "That's what I should do. Look here, old fellow! you can't expect that

woman's affections, without showing confidence in her. She's full of pride, and she said to me, 'Let him do something for me, and then he'll see what I am.' Of course it's no business of mine; but since you ask my advice," said Phil (which the other had not done), "I give it, that's all." And the friendly man of law balanced himself on his chair between the desk and wall, and threw up a small ruler a little way, which he caught, as if he were practising honest sleight of hand.

"And suppose, if I did, she was to bolt?" inquired the other.

"Let her!" magnanimously returned Mr. Cousens. "Let her, I say. And if you're the man I take you to be, you wouldn't regret the outlay, that's all."

"Hem!" said the other, "it's all very well to talk; but a man don't like to be done."

"It's my opinion," quoth Phil, still throwing up his ruler, and speaking very slowly, as if the occupation were of much more moment than the advice, "that she'll no more bolt from you, old fellow, than—than—this ruler." At this moment he nearly overbalanced himself, and the ruler came down with some violence on the floor.

"Then you really advise me?" said the other.

"I advise—nothing!" said Phil, recommencing to "toss the caber," as he facetiously called it. "I certainly believe the woman loves you" (here he narrowly escaped being hit on the head); "and she thinks you don't really care for her. Women are strange beings," added Phil. "Look at Joan of Arc, and Mary Queen of Scots, and the Maid of Sara-

gossa. By-the-bye, did you ever see such a likeness as there is between a certain party and that print?"

"Well, now you say so," replied Pylades, rather flattered by the idea, "I rather think there is. I wonder I never noticed it before. The fact is, Phil, I don't mind telling you, that Mabel has grown very queer-tempered of late, and if I thought any little thing I could do would do any good, you see, why I wouldn't much mind risking a little, eh?"

"You know best," replied Phil; "but perhaps you'd better wait a month or two, and see about it."

"And the Derby so near?" said Pylades, reflectingly; "and Cremorne just going to open?"

What these events had to do with the matter, probably the speaker could best explain himself; but Mr. Cousens understood him for all that.

The fish had swallowed the bait, and the troller could very well afford to slacken his line now. So he merely remarked that he was a "dear old fellow," knew his own affairs best, and that all he had to say was, that he, Orestes, should not be in a hurry, if he were Pylades, "you know." The consequence of all this was that Mr. Cousens received implicit instructions immediately to prepare the papers settling the one thousand pounds, and bestowing the furniture of No. 64, Lorrimore Villas, upon this faithless Circe, who wore a gipsy hat in the rural vicinity of the Haymarket.

But it chanced that Pylades, who made over the furniture the very next day, and who was to complete the gift of the thousand pounds, which necessitated a transfer of stock, on the following Monday, received

information of such a startling character on the Saturday following his interview with Orestes, that he called at that worthy's chambers on Sunday, and put the matter to him in an ingenious and most inconvenient form. He wanted, he said, to ask his friend Phil's advice on behalf of another friend, who was suffering a shameful wrong at the hands of a man whom he trusted, and who was bound to him by every tie of gratitude."

Mr. Cousens was all attention. "You know, old fellow, I'll give you or any friend of yours the best advice I can," he said.

The fact was he scented a new client.

"It's a very delicate affair," said the other; "because it won't bear publicity, you see. But what should you think of a fellow who behaved as follows?" He then gave a sketch of his own position and Cousens's advice, without naming amounts, names, or particulars. "And all the while," he said, "this lying, pettifogging rascal, this fair-spoken, treacherous scoundrel, was intriguing with the wretched woman himself. Now, would you advise my friend," he continued, "to kick and horsewhip him, as he deserves, and thereby to publish his own folly and absurdity, as well as the whole affair; or to treat him with silent abhorrence and contempt, and never speak to him, or have anything to do with him again?"

Mr. Cousens tried to laugh, but the effort was hysterical, and produced only a slight rattling in his throat.

"What do you advise?" said the other, staring

him in the face, not in the eyes; for his own were fixed on the pattern in the carpet; and the ghastly hues of a chameleon altogether in a bad and unhealthy way, were chasing each other over his mottled face, ordinarily rather highly coloured with a sort of scrofulous flush.

"All's fair in love, you know," he began at length.

"What!" cried the other, "and in friendship too. No, no! my kind, disinterested, considerate friend, it is a lie, a foul lie, to say that all is fair in love. It is the pretext of the seducer and swindler in one—the basest insult he can offer to the deity whose very mention his lying lips profane." The poor fellow had actually become eloquent in his wrongs. "It is a lie, I tell you, at the best, friend Cousens, and you know it. There is nothing fair in love but truth, and no love without it." He was thinking of all the falsehoods which had imposed upon his own foolish passion. "And at the worst," he shouted, "at the worst, in such a case as this, there is no dock bad enough in which to place a man who dares to offer such plea; no punishment sufficiently degrading; no criminal of the ordinary stamp, thief, forger, murderer though he be, bad enough to be consigned to the same cell—for he has stolen, forged, and murdered the only attributes which make us better than beasts that prey on each other, better than the skunk, or the rat, the crawling, noisome reptiles of the sewer. Excuse my heat," he said, "my dear friend Phil, but don't you agree with me? I can't think of it with patience; and whatever you say out

of friendship to keep me cool and calm, I know you must think as I do. Why, you look quite agitated and moved yourself. No! I can't stop and smoke to-day, dear old boy!" (Mr. Cousens had made an abortive effort to put a cigar in his own mouth.) "I need not have asked your advice. I knew you would feel indignant; but don't be anxious about my friend. I shall tell him to cut the blackguard, that is all, never to speak to him, nor to shake hands with him" (and here he went through the process of wiping his hand with his handkerchief) "again; to shut the door on him, as I am going to shut this, and leave him to his own thoughts and conscience, eh? Good-bye, my dear friend. Thank you, thank you! Good-bye!" And Pylades left Orestes looking not only as if a bomb-shell had exploded at his feet, but as if he should like one to explode at that moment.

Gradually his injured feelings took the form of wrath. "The cursed idiot!" he said to himself; "as if one could help it; as if any one could have loved *him*." And here Mr. Cousens rose, and adjusted his shirt-collar in the glass over his chimney-piece. His eye thence fell on his Sunday pair of patent boots. "It's lucky," he muttered to himself, "that the fool hadn't the pluck to speak out what he meant, or I might have had to kick him down-stairs." As there was no one present to hear him, this little piece of brag presented a curious psychological phenomenon. The taste of the day is, as we are informed by some publishers, minute mental analysis. The novel-reading public delight in the minutest dissection of

a country curate's heart, under such circumstances as guilty love for his married cousin, or they are interested in the motives of the Bishop of Boreham's lady, when she invited Mr. Squabchick, the radical independent preacher, to her most select conversation. The warmest fancies of an unhealthy girl's mind articulately developing themselves are at a premium, providing that the said heroine is sufficiently plain; and isolated—say in a Cornwall vicarage. It might, therefore, be worth our while to dissect and expose Mr. Cousens's inmost thoughts and metaphysical condition. He had no more idea of kicking the stalwart Graham, for such was his "friend's" name, than of engaging in single combat with Mace. Why, then, did he talk about kicking him to himself? Of course men like to deceive themselves, and be deceived sometimes, against the convictions of their own reason; but why indulge in such tremendous and groundless bounce as this, when the other mental half of Mr. Cousens—and considerably the bigger half—was only congratulating that gentleman on the turn which his friend's resentment had taken? "After all it might have been worse," thought that portion of the reasoning Mr. Cousens. It is a contradiction which we are unable to explain. He deemed himself lucky to have escaped personal chastisement at the hands or feet of Graham, and yet talked to himself aloud about the necessity which might have arisen of kicking him. Perhaps he addressed this deceitful soliloquy to his boots.

Mr. Cousens next proceeded to consider matters generally in relation to the offended client of the firm.

“ I must tell Grindery something or other to account for his leaving us, which won’t be difficult, as his affairs are in my hands. I must put him up to retouching his last bill of costs, as we shall get no more out of him. Confound him ! How did he find it all out ? Let’s see, she’s got the furniture, and to-morrow would have had the ‘thou.’ besides. Well, it can’t be helped. I must see her this evening.”

Mr. Cousens did call at No. 64, Lorrimore Villas, that evening, and had a stormy interview with its fair occupant, who accused him of ruining her prospects. Many savage and bitter things passed ; and finally the astute, worldly Mr. Cousens, under the influence of sundry vinous and spirituous potations, actually promised marriage to the vulgar and violent Circe, who hated and despised him in her heart. But she had long nourished the ambition of being Mrs. Cousens, and her mingled reproaches and allurements were eminently successful on the night in question. The fact is that Mr. Cousens had long been immersed in the “ wretchlessness of unclean living, which is no less perilous than desperation.” Not only does such a man’s taste become more vitiated by indulgence ; but even his worldly intelligence deserts him at his utmost need. The way of a man stricken by the fascinations of a depraved woman, is as wonderful and incomprehensible as anything that Solomon declared his inability to solve. Mr. Cousens knew that he was about to do a foolish, if not a fatal thing : moreover, he was thoroughly ashamed of it ; but still he had no power to resist. He had at first triumphed in his successful baseness, and then in turn it swallowed him up.

He had entered the serpent's haunt, in a pleasant and jaunty manner, and was encircled in the pestiferous folds of the constrictor, while rejoicing in his criminal success.

It may easily be conceived that with this weight of consciousness on his mind, and the recollection of the biting sarcasms of Graham festering in his breast, Mr. Cousens, in spite of his double stimulant of pale ale, like the Irishman in Lover's charming song, was "not himself at all," on the Monday morning to which we have drawn our readers' attention in the beginning of this chapter.

To use his own expression, "Phil was far from being alive." The subject which occupied the two members of the firm was the distressing and ruinous state of Mr. Aubrey's affairs, and the terrible catastrophe which had occurred to his wife. No one had seen Blanche since. It was openly stated and noised abroad that Mrs. Aubrey had committed suicide. There was the police case of the orange-girl and the wet cloak found in her possession, which she said had belonged to a "drowned" person, and it was recognised by the frantic Susan as having been worn by her mistress. Strange to say, Mr. Cousens had not heard a word of it, previous to his arrival at the office that day. He had heard, "Awful suicide of a lady!" cried in the streets. He had seen, "Distressing suicide!" on the newspaper placards; but he had not looked at any paper that morning, nor made any inquiry as to the person to whom these announcements referred. To say that even he was not shocked, in the common acceptation of the term, when Mr. Grin-

derby imparted the intelligence of Mrs. Aubrey's supposed dreadful end, would be almost condemnatory even of his shallow feelings and heartless disposition ; but he was too full of his own affairs and troubles to dwell upon it, after a few moments devoted to astonishment, except so far as it might be regarded in a business point of view. Again, other feelings supervened. Mr. Cousens had always hated Mrs. Aubrey. He knew that she fully understood him and disliked him. All this he remembered. The coldness and formality of her tones, her frigid and condescending politeness, and the early check she had given to the genteel freedom of his address—all this occurred to him ; until ere long he began to regard her tragical end with a sort of savage complacency and approval. Mingled with this was the rancour he had lately felt towards Aubrey, who had been anything but friendly or familiar with him of late. As for Grinderby, he was anything but chagrined at the occurrence. It was a deadly social blow to Aubrey, and consequently suited his book well. The ruined client was to him as a stranded vessel to a wrecker. Not a plank must be left to hold together ; and if the doomed ship could be branded as a pirate or slaver—why, so much the better. Everything that tended to sink Aubrey in the estimation of the world would diminish sympathy and inquiry as to how the firm had assisted in and profited by his ruin. The suicide of blind Mrs. Aubrey, occasioned by her husband's disreputable escapades, was a finishing stroke to that client's reputation, beyond anything which Mr. Grinderby could possibly have anticipated. But he

did not think it necessary to state his real sentiments to Mr. Cousens, any more than that gentleman felt inclined to reveal his secret notions unreservedly to him.

They had accordingly together duly deplored the calamity which the senior partner had narrated to the junior. We shall pass over all that portion of their conversation, before they came to the consideration of the event in a business point of view.

"As you say," observed Mr. Grinderby, after the preliminary tribute to decency had been paid, and there had been a considerable pause, "as you say, a most distressing event; but the firm must not be prejudiced by your feelings, Mr. Cousens."

It is due to that professional gentleman's reputation to mention that Mr. Cousens had not rendered this observation necessary by exhibiting any very alarming degree of emotion.

"Mrs. Aubrey was no friend of mine," replied Cousens; "and as for the firm, she never evinced any respect or partiality for it whatsoever. Quite the contrary; but we cannot help our feelings, sir."

"Oh, Mr. Cousens," said Grinderby, with a hideous contortion, "think of the frightful wickedness of the act!" And he rose and walked up and down, as if the idea overpowered him. "As for our client, Mr. Aubrey, quite independently of this, he is a ruined man, sir, a ruined man."

"It is a bad job for him," continued the senior partner, after a pause, "that he is so tied up by the clauses of anticipation in his father's will; he can't raise a penny on the estate."

We will continue the conversation that ensued between the pair in the first person, so that it may lose nothing by the interpolations which would otherwise be necessary.

GRINDERBY. The firm, Mr. Cousens, the firm must not suffer by this break up. (And he rubbed his hands, as if in anticipation of the salvage.)

COUSENS. Bingley's Wharf sold badly enough.

GRIN. Had our client waited a month longer than he did, it would have realised fifty thousand pounds at least.

COUS. Yes, the railway came right through the warehouses. And you knew it for at least six months before.

GRIN. Hush! It suited the firm to place no impediment in the way of the sale. I am sure we did not recommend so imprudent and hasty a step. At least, I can speak for myself; and I hope, I may say I sincerely trust, that you did not. No! I thought not. None can impeach the conduct of the firm. I burnt Mr. Pettingall's letter informing us of the fact. That letter was marked "private." I really do not consider that we were bound, even in equity, to take twenty-eight thousand pounds out of the railway directors' pockets, to put them into those of our client. It would have been a public robbery, sir. As I said, I burnt that letter. Never keep such things by you, Mr. Cousens. There is no saying when they may turn up. Your health has been far from satisfactory, lately. I hope you don't keep anything that might compromise the firm. I wish you were a trifle, just a trifle, more cautious. I admit your good qualities

—excellent *touter* for West-end business, and as unblushing as——

COUS. Yourself.

GRIN. The devil ! Don't interrupt me, pray. Well, I was going to say, that by the default of his father's confidential managing clerk and cashier, Manvers, at present, I believe I may say, a distinguished citizen of the United States, our client lost at least ten thousand pounds to commence with.

COUS. Have you heard then from Manvers lately ?

GRIN. Do, pray, hear me out. You are so very impetuous, Mr. Cousens. I was about to observe that the firm did its duty there. I said to our client : "Prosecute, sir, prosecute. You owe it to Society. It is true that you have known him since you were a child, and were taught to venerate him, when he dispensed the weekly trifle which your late lamented father allowed you, his only son, in order to teach economy and habits of business. It is true," added I, "that you find it difficult to divest your mind of a sort of traditional reverence for those colossal piles of figures, which were his boast in your father's counting-house, and to which he, this defaulting clerk, used to point so complacently, telling you that he could not endure to be a halfpenny wrong in his balances, and that he sat up all night upon one occasion in order to find out and rectify a mistake of that very trifling amount."

COUS. Yes, yes. They were minute calculations to defraud, extending over a period of years.

GRIN. A period of five years only, Mr. Cousens ; if I remember aright. Well, the discovery of the embez-

zlement was remarkable enough. His impunity had made Manvers reckless. A natural disposition of the criminal mind! Let's see. It was just about the time that you picked your client up, nailed the business, ha, ha! of the "Aubrey Estates, entailed," in your very neatest slap-dash manner. I am content to work here in gaiters; you are the roving partner in patent leather boots. I toiled and moiled; while you went yachting with our rich client in the Mediterranean. I think you were consumptive about that time. I do hope it is not now the case. You don't take sufficient care of yourself, indeed you don't. Well, you were an interesting invalid then—chest weak, eh? How agreeable you must have made yourself! You nursed him in his illness, rode his horses, drank his wine, borrowed his money, without any inconvenient documents passing between "gentlemen and friends," called his yacht yours, on shore, when he was not present, spouted his poetry—wonderful self-sacrifice that—and made love to his mistresses, who made love to you in return, in order to keep in with the second self, ha! ha! the lawyer and the man of the world.

COUS. Really, Mr. Grinderby, this is a most extraordinary display of facetiousness, which I am at a loss to appreciate or comprehend. When you have done——

GRIN. The subject is so tempting, Mr. Cousens, that I have lost the thread of my narrative, got back into the recitals, as it were. Ha, ha! I was saying—what was I saying?—Ah! that I urged our client to prosecute Manvers. It was all of no use. Our

client nobly permitted Manvers to emigrate to America; where, but for an unfortunate restriction in the laws of that enlightened country, he might yet become President of the United States, and receive an autograph letter from the Queen, without the little formalities he was accustomed to here, such as, "Victoria, by the grace of God, greeting," &c. Do you take? It suited the firm very well that Manvers escaped the penalties of the British law, and found a wider scope and area for the exercise of too great daring for this old-fashioned country. (Here Mr. Grinderby helped himself plentifully to his accustomed stimulant.)

COUS. Yes; but he did not go then. There was a suspicion afterwards——

GRIN. Of a darker crime, of a more dangerous error. True, but he baffled his pursuers. I know, of course, what you allude to. Yes, he returned from Jersey or Guernsey, whither he betook himself at first, and succeeded, previous to the murder business, in corrupting Pettingall, the other remaining confidential clerk. Then came Pettingall's detection. I urged our client still more strongly to prosecute him. "This man," said I, "has a wife and seven children." Was it seven or nine? I really am not quite certain. "Do not let your too generous heart be influenced by this circumstance," I remarked. "The parish will take care of them. His wife," I added, "may waylay you and bathe your feet with her tears. She is actually in this office at this moment for that purpose." Or, let me see, it was you, I think, who told him that, with your usual inadvertence. I have often

wondered how you could be so thoughtless, Mr. Cousens. Then we heard a sob from yonder room. I presume that you had left the door ajar by accident; but I will not be on oath that it was. If it was, all I can say is, that it was very careless of you, Mr. Cousens. That sob was well timed for Pettingall. Our foolish and now ruined client insisted on seeing her. It was all over in five minutes. Pettingall is now manager of a flourishing Company, raised on the very business connexion of our client's late father. I dined with him on Sunday. He has some superb pictures and port wine. I often think of the disinterested conduct of the firm on that occasion, in urging the adoption of the severest measures; for it certainly would not have suited us that Pettingall should have been prosecuted any more than Manvers.

COUS. All this is so exceedingly well known to me, that I wonder you should take the trouble to repeat it. May I ask what you are driving at?

GRIN. If I could only school your mind, Mr. Cousens, into more painstaking habits, more categorical precision!

COUS. You would die happy, I suppose. But pray continue your amusement.

GRIN. I was never more in earnest. Seriously, I wish to bring the whole matter clearly before you; and to do so necessitates a little patience on your part, and prolixity on mine. Where was I?

COUS. You were remarking that it did not suit the firm, that Pettingall should be prosecuted any more than Manvers.

GRIN. Just so. (*Takes snuff.*) Allow me to congratulate you on your attention. Well, then, Pettingall, who had control over everything after Manvers had left, was supposed to have informed our client of his exact position, of the purport of the will, of the value of the property, assets, liabilities, and so forth, besides the fact that our client's Life Estate is liable; and not, as appears to have been supposed by him until now, the whole estates, including that portion entailed upon his cousin, for the very heavy annuities paid out of them. Otherwise, it would have been our duty to inform our client of this trifling circumstance. I must say that his carelessness and ignorance of business were unparalleled; but the firm, sir, the firm could not help that. I wonder, however, that you never apprised him of the fact, Mr. Cousens. He is your special client, you know. Then, what with the burning down of his family mansion, uninsured—very deplorable event that—the lowering of his rents by the flexibility of his country agents, the absconding of the tenant on his largest farm, leaving a year's rent unpaid, and the land greatly impoverished, and his weak and absurd direction of the will of an aged aunt who was devoted to him in favour of a female cousin, thereby making her a present of a sum of nearly twelve thousand pounds, a portion of which he actually owes, and for which he is about to be vicariously sued by that pious and business-like woman, who has cleverly transferred the debt—all this, sir, coupled with his own ridiculous expenditure, has, I deeply regret to say, brought our client to the very verge of ruin by the forfeiture of his estate.

COUS. I thought there was a chance of raising the whole amount from the "Albatross," or some other large insurance office, on a policy to cover all?

GRIN. That is his own preposterous notion. I am surprised, Mr. Cousens, that you should have encouraged such an obvious delusion. Pray, sir, what security could he give for payment of the premiums?

COUS. Then you mean to say that it is all U.P. with him?

GRIN. He has not the ghost of a chance, sir. At this moment he is not really worth the price of a dinner at an eating-house.

COUS. And you gave a cheque for ten guineas on his account to a charity-school last Tuesday!

GRIN. Hem! Possibly I was wrong there. But I was not quite prepared until this morning for the final stoppage—the winding-up order, as I may say, Mr. Cousens.

COUS. And he is not yet aware of the real state of his affairs?

GRIN. Um! I thought it only just to prepare him a little the other day. You were not here—some private business, I think—assignment of furniture *re* Graham and lady, if I am not mistaken—was it not? I conveyed a faint foreshadowing of the truth. But, I must say, I don't think that he realised it at all perfectly. You see he is still surrounded by certain substantial tokens of wealth—houses, furniture, horses, and the like. A little string has to be pulled yet, and then——

COUS. The shadows alone remain. A pretty dissolving picture, as one may say. I should think that

all this, coupled with Mrs. Aubrey's suicide, will bring down his pride at last with a run.

GRIN. Pride goes before a fall, Mr. Cousens. You must feel for him deeply, who have been so intimate with him. I never was. I am happy to say, sir, that he never was a personal friend of mine.

COUS. If you mean to wound my feelings unnecessarily, Mr. Grinderby, all I can say is, that I suppose I must put up with it! But I must remind you that much even of my undoubted intimacy with Mr. Aubrey was a mere matter of business.

GRIN. So much the better, sir, so much the better. There is less chance of sentiment interfering with duty. Oblige me by a sight of the ledger. Thank you! Hem! hem! (*reading it*). You must make our bill of costs heavier.

COUS. It can't be done; I believe we have charged him even for acknowledging a basket of game. I have debited him a guinea a day and expenses, even for my most friendly visits. I met him in Chancery-lane the day after the intelligence of the wreck of his yacht, the vessel in which I made that trip to which you have been pleased so facetiously to allude. You will see entered: "To conference with you, when you stated the loss of your pleasure-vessel, thirteen shillings and fourpence." I mention this to show you that I have done my duty scrupulously by the firm (*with emotion*), sinking the feelings of a friend utterly in my treatment.

GRIN. I thought he had rather dropped your friendship of late?

COUS. No, Mr. Grinderby, no, sir; on the other

hand, I have rather dropped his. The fact is, I could not bear to witness such extravagance, and—certainly he has behaved ill, sir, very ill; but I referred only to the past. Unfortunately, Mr. Grinderby, I am burdened with a heart, yes, sir, a heart! (And here Mr. Cousens lightly and airily tapped the left side of his somewhat contracted pectoral department.)

GRIN. You haven't been butcher enough to charge that in the bill, have you? Listen, Mr. Cousens. Always, as a "principle," put down double to a poor client, but treble to one in difficulties. In a case like this, it is a principle which admits of almost unlimited extension. But be careful how you make your bill out against a rich client to whom the transfer of his business is not only a possible, but an easy undertaking.

COUS. Really, Mr. Grinderby, you talk to me as if I were a child, a boy scarcely out of my articles. But it is your pleasure to insult me this morning. Continue, sir, I beg."

GRIN. Old Dick Scrimshire, to whom I was articled in the country, the best lawyer I ever knew, who would have charged his own mother's executors for attending her funeral, if he had been able; a man who never had a feeling in his life, and always acted on principle to the last, once handed me a silver bed-candlestick, on which was a complimentary inscription to himself from the Lord Lieutenant of his county, also a man of principle, and the most pedantic hypocrite of his day, a nobleman who took honours at the university without talent, and bored all Cidershire successfully on the strength of it

during his whole lifetime, a man who gained a reputation for charity without ever giving away a penny, and set the most delightful example of goodness to his neighbours that possibly could be conceived. Well, I naturally observed to old Scrimshire, that it was no wonder he was so rich, and able to live up to the requirements of a splendid Elizabethan country mansion, with such clients as his lordship. "Stop," he said, "my boy, there's no hurry. What did you think of the sentiment I uttered at family prayers this very evening?" I was obliged to own I didn't know; for I had been looking at a pretty housemaid between my fingers as I was kneeling, and didn't notice exactly what old Scrimshire was saying. I was a brand, sir, then, a brand, since saved out of the burning. "I never got out of Lord Mortington," said he, "anything but the value of that candlestick. And what's more," he said, "I've got five noble lords for clients; and I never made a penny by the whole lot." "Then, sir," said I, "I don't understand anything at all; for I should have thought that was what made you rich." "That!" replied old Scrimshire, "that be blowed;" and he suited the action to the word, blowing his own candle out. Not that, if all was true, he much liked the dark, didn't old Scrimshire. "I'll tell you what, young man," he continued, "I never made a penny directly by the whole lot, and you may throw old Sir Phipson Feckenham," naming a well-known wealthy country baronet who was his client, "into the bargain. Not but what this sort of thing is worth money," he added; "for when you've got the

rich and titled for your clients, you can do as you like with the rest. Never make out a heavy bill against a man that can take his own part, lad Grinderby," he said. "There, take thy light, and don't forget thy lesson. It will make a rich man of thee some day when I'm dead and buried." I loved him as a father, Mr. Cousens, which don't mean more than a proper respect for the inheritance, and I've acted up to his saying ever since.

Mr. Cousens was somewhat surprised at his partner's garrulity; but he said nothing more, save to ask whether or not he should make Mr. Aubrey any more advances, if they were requested.

"Mr. Cousens, sir!" answered Grinderby. "How can you ask such a question! Yes, certainly, on the valid security of two friends, and I think it would puzzle him to find one in the world. Otherwise not a penny, sir, not a penny. We have all his deeds and papers, I think?"

"Everything," said Cousens, "including the maps of his estates, and his own deeds of gift to half a dozen small annuitants, including his late father's coachman and butler, the half-yearly dividends of which are due, by-the-bye, to-morrow. I suppose I may pay these?"

"Pay nothing, sir," returned the senior; "but receive everything. We shall have, as it is, to forego a portion of our bill of costs, though I have kept it down from time to time, in anticipation of his ruin."

"Is the declaration out in *Aubrey v. Flitter*?" asked Grinderby.

"No," answered Cousens.

"Then stop it!" said his partner. "We cannot afford to carry on litigation any further for a fellow like him."

"But we are certain to recover heavy damages," interposed Cousens.

"Fie, Mr. Cousens," retorted Grinderby, "I thought you knew better than that. There never was a case yet came into Court of which the issue was certain; that is, unless either plaintiff or defendant should happen to be unable to fight it out for want of money. And even then there is always the dread of bankruptcy. Don't talk to me about the rights of a case. I'm proud to say, sir, that the law is above such paltry trammels. 'The better the case the less chance of a verdict,' is my motto. I thought you knew better than talk such sentimental rubbish, Mr. Cousens."

"As you please, sir," replied Cousens; "I wish to be guided entirely by you in this matter."

"We are ready for the painful event," returned Grinderby, taking a prolonged pinch of snuff. "Of course we shall speak with great consideration, and in a style due to the character and feelings of the firm. He will be at first enraged, and then astounded; and will finally seek out a respectable firm to attack us, and tax our bill. So much the better. A sharp practitioner might give us trouble, if he saw his way. It is no use concealing that such a man as old Scrimshire could put the worst construction on our conduct and motives. There is no saying, unfortunately, what some members of the profession will do. Are you attending, Mr. Cousens?"

That gentleman implied his assent; but the fact was, his thoughts had really wandered off to *Lorimore Villas*.

"The state of the case is as follows," resumed *Grinderby*. "Our client owes one thousand seven hundred and sixty-four pounds sixteen shillings and ninepence halfpenny, arrears of interest on the mortgage effected by his late father, and which he ought to have paid out of the personalty on the demise. I think you persuaded him to invest in *Ecuador Bonds* or *Paraguay Securities*, or something of that kind, at the time?"

"You are quite mistaken, I assure you," interrupted *Cousens*. "I did nothing of the kind."

"Not the least consequence," said *Grinderby*; "the advice was not written, I suppose. Now, I must contrive to alarm the mortgagees suddenly, who still believe our client to be a rich, extravagant young dog. I think we had better not apprise the other creditors as yet. Then, if we put an execution at once into the house, and force a sale of the settled property through the assignment by *Aubrey's* cousin, which I spoke of, and in which matter the assignees, a country firm, only await a hint from me, I think we shall have managed the business pretty well, *Mr. Cousens*, pretty well."

"But I can't quite see the ultimate advantage you are driving at," said *Cousens*. "Might we not have made more in the end by saving our client—mind I speak entirely without feeling in the matter—and wouldn't it have been a safer game?"

Mr. Grinderby cast a curious glance at his partner,

as if he would have read his inmost thoughts, even had they fled for concealment down into the very toes of his patent-leather boots. The scrutiny seemed to reassure him. The fact is, Mr. Grinderby had a much deeper, and darker, and blacker design, and one in which both partners of the firm were not intended by him to participate.

"No, sir," he replied, "it would not. It was my earnest desire to have saved Mr. Aubrey from absolute ruin, if it had been only for your sake, who are his friend. Ahem! stop! an idea strikes me. Don't you think, as you are so shocked by this deplorable and afflicting event, you had better go out of town for awhile, and leave the present painful duty which devolves on us, on me? Suppose you took the feelings of the firm down with you to the Isle of Wight, or Boulogne—what do you say to Boulogne for a week or so? You can come back before there is any chance of meeting our client there, you know. But between ourselves, I think that Whitecross-street will be the outside limit of his excursions this year. A trip to the East! eh? Not so bad, that. Won't entitle him to membership in the Travellers' Club though, will it?"

The proposition suited Mr. Cousens extremely well at the moment, for more reasons than one. The fact is, he did not want, on mature reflection, to be obliged to kick Graham; nor, to say the truth, did he care much to meet the first violence of Aubrey's wrath. So he assented with a mere formal expression that he had no desire to shirk work. How long this already long conversation would have extended even

then, it is impossible to say ; for Grinderby was evidently in the mood to talk. Like all reserved men, when he did break out, there was no stopping him. When any one wanted him to converse, he would be unpleasantly taciturn. He was like the singers commemorated by Horace :

*Ut nunquam inducant animum cantare rogati ;
Injussi, nunquam desistant.*

A knock at the door, however, relieved Mr. Cousens from any further penance ; for however interesting the subject Mr. Grinderby had ventilated, the junior partner felt he had had enough of it. Besides, his nerves were unstrung, and he wanted another glass of "bitter."

"Come in !" croaked the harsh voice of Grinderby.

A shy-looking individual, we mean in personal appearance, not manners, entered. He looked like a cross between a waiter at a fifth-rate tavern, and a billiard-marker in the City. He wore a monkey-jacket, of which the blue edges were grown whitish with use, and the left sleeve presented the appearance of a pen-wiper ; and why shouldn't it, since it had done good service in that capacity ? His black hair was parted and plastered down the middle, and his face resembled one of the Lipari islands, subject to continual eruption.

"The writ for the widow Tomkins is ready, sir," said this individual.

"Very distressing, Mr. Slurker, indeed I may say a painful necessity ; but the firm must do its duty, sir, irrespective of its feelings."

There was a slight earthquake, a suppressed upheaving of the surface, visible in the seat of the eruption. Mr. Slurker would have grinned, but dared not. The fact is, he had heard the remark before, and was prepared for it.

"Hark ye, Mr. Slurker," continued Grinderby. "If Mr. Aubrey should call, I will see him, as Mr. Cousens is going to Boulogne for his health. He is greatly shocked, sir, by intelligence which has reached him this morning. As I shall be very busy, you can let Mr. Aubrey wait for half an hour in the clerks' office when he comes. Do you understand, Mr. Slurker?"

"Yes, sir," replied that worthy; "offer him 'The Times'?"

"Hem!" said Grinderby, "why no, not exactly to-day. That might be inconvenient, Mr. Slurker."

"Yes, sir, it might, certainly," replied Slurker. "Then I'm not to offer him 'The Times'?"

"Pooh, pooh! get along with you. Do as you like. After all, the firm has not time to study feelings."

Mr. Slurker looked puzzled, and made his exit. He remained in perfect ignorance of Mr. Grinderby's meaning till lunch-time, when he took a spell at the police reports. As he did so, the eruption grew a trifle paler.

"The infernal old vampire!" he said, "if he's got a heart at all, which I very much doubt, it's a precious sight harder than a grindstone. Poor thing! poor thing! And such a beauty! I remember she quite took my breath away the day she called at the office.

I never saw a woman to compare with her for looks ; no, not even in the Argyll Rooms." And Mr. Slurker fell into a reverie, in which he figured as a red-cross knight, slew Aubrey in single combat, consigned Grinderby to the deepest dungeon under his castle moat, and as a reward, married Blanche, whom he saved from the foaming waters by grasping her with one arm round her waist, and holding on with the other to a weeping willow, such as he had seen somewhere between Cremorne and Mortlake. And they say that chivalry is dead in the human mind !

"Good Heavens, sir !" said Cousens to Grinderby, as soon as Mr. Slurker had vanished, "you surely don't think, do you, that Aubrey will come here *to-day* ?"

"Why not?" returned the other; "where else should he go? What fitter place can there be, than a solicitor's office under such circumstances? Besides, he could not have cared for her much, if all tales are true. As far as he is concerned, I think it is about the only good thing that could happen to him. What could he have done, sir? And what could she have done? I don't suppose she would have liked being a governess again!"

"Nay," replied Cousens, "he must feel it."

"Feel a fiddlestick!" quoth Grinderby. "What did he cause her to drown herself for, then? But if he does, I should like to know where so wholesome a check upon feeling is to be found, as here? For the solace of misery by counter-irritation, I'll back Webb's Fields against all the world, especially in the case of a ruined client."

Mr. Cousens said no more. Of the precise nature of Aubrey's domestic offences, perhaps he was a better judge than Grinderby, who, though an offender in that way himself, was not so from idleness or vanity. He also knew better how to estimate the nature of the terrible chastisements that had fallen upon his client and quondam friend. He knew that that day, ay, and for weeks, and probably months, it was highly improbable the shadow of Arthur Aubrey would darken the doorway of the firm in Webb's Fields—ruin or no ruin, threat or no threat, advantage or disadvantage. But, on the whole, he favoured the notion of getting away. He preferred to escape the immediate chance of meeting anywhere, or anyhow, the ruined client and the betrayed patron and injured friend. Besides, there was the Graham business, as we have said. So he merely asked Grinderby, if he should want to see him again before his departure, which that gentleman answered in the negative.

"But," he added, "I should be glad if you could meet me at the 'Ferret and Blue Bag' to lunch, at two o'clock. I am going home thence. The fact is, I have promised my girls a walk. I am shortly going to send Mrs. G. and the young people down to Herne Bay for a month. I shall come up to town every day by railway. Ah! Mr. Cousens, what an opportunity for religious study that affords. When I live out of town, I always bring up my Bible and a volume of sermons in the train. I wish I could prevail on you to do the same," he added. "We busy lawyers are too apt to lose sight of our immortal

reversions in the unremitting prosecution of our mundane affairs. For my part, I never think that business prospers during the week, if I neglect my religious duties on a Sunday. You are a sad heathen, Mr. Cousens, a sad heathen, sir. It looks ill even in a worldly point of view. I wish you would attend church regularly."

The heathen partner duly promised to meet his pious associate at the tavern he had mentioned, and the pair separated, Mr. Cousens to purchase a yacht-jacket and glazed hat of nautical pretensions for his trip, and Mr. Grinderby to his own especial den to knit the final meshes of Aubrey's doom.

They had barely left the room, when the sandy head of their junior common-law clerk, whom some would have termed an errand-boy, was thrust in. Approaching Mr. Cousens's table, he laid thereon a copy of the "Law Times," which had just come in, peeped about to discover if he could pick up any information from an open letter, picked up some scraps of torn papers from the floor, put them together, before consigning them to the waste-basket, to see if there was any secret he might glean, and then indulged in the following remarks, accompanied by a series of winks and grimaces which would have done credit to the late eminent comedian Mr. Robson, or that most promising chip of the old block and living likeness of him, his son. "Ritooral-looral-loo!" said this worthy to himself. "Ain't the governors agoing to have a jolly flare-up with our swell client, Mr. Aubrey! We shall quite miss him, I declare. Such prime cigars he smokes! Quite an ornament to

our office. And then the tin boxes, all lettered so conspikuous—the ‘Estate of John Aubrey, deceased,’ ‘Life Estate of Arthur Aubrey, Eskvire,’ ‘Aubrey’s Trustees,’ which the other two resigned immediate, and never did nothing, as I’ve heard say, that he might ruin hisself more easier under the directions of this gallus firm of ourn. They’ve got a precious firm hold of him. Ha, ha! and a personal friend, too, of Phil Cousens, honest Phil, gentleman by Act of Parlyment! I should like to have such a friend as him, I should. Don’t I wish Aubrey would kick our senior pardner all round the Fields. And if he was to, wouldn’t I like ’em to be a sight bigger than they are? And wouldn’t I wish all the porters and perlice fur enough whilst he was doing of it, that’s all?”

CHAPTER XV.

THE SMOKING-ROOM OF THE KEMBLE CLUB.

Here, wit and affluence gather ; "snob" and "swell,"
 In conclave meet, their empty secrets tell ;
 The playwright "button-holds" the actor here ;
 Small poets quaff their Helicon of beer :
 Great (?) authors dine and sup like other men,
 And brighter shine with tooth-pick than with pen ;
 Coxcombs and lords the field of art adorn,
 Like poppies seen mid Linnel's ripening corn ;
 As close as mortar unto brick doth lie,
 The blatant "Umbra" to his god cleaves nigh :
 Here, sneaking scribes purloin their daily scrawl ;
 While jealous Scandal holds her Court midst all ;
 Sour Mediocrity in hose of blue
 Proclaims her empire o'er the dwarfish crew.
 Let genius die unpublished and unread—
 "Mute Miltons? Pshaw! when scores can rhyme instead,
 So safely and so cleverly obscure,
 The Sphinx could scarce an equal test endure.
 What is a poet worth, who sings so clear,
 That in his rhymes some meaning *will* appear ?
 In this fast age 'bloke' Shakespeare wouldn't pay ;
 He lacked construction for a modern play."
 Thus, the tenth Muse, whom shuddering Phœbus flies,
 To join the other nine in farthest skies ;
 Such the drear babble of the godless gang,
 Who raise the altar, true worth lacks, to slang.

The Modern Baviad, Canto IX.

IN the lofty and well-ventilated apartment devoted to the "weed" in that semi-aristocratic, demi-plebeian, literary, dramatic, and artistic establish-

ment, the Kemble Club, were assembled, after dinner, some six members and a brace of strangers, among whom, for some little time previous to the moment we have invited our readers to look in upon them, there had prevailed a truly British silence, combined with that effort to appear unconscious of the presence of others, which is so characteristic of the manners of the unIntroduced Englishman. We do not mean to say that they were all unacquainted with each other, seeing that the two strangers had each severally dined with a member; but it is awkward for any two out of a party not generally acquainted with each other to carry on a conversation before all the rest. It is odd how forced and unnatural such talk usually seems to the rest of the company. It generally sounds like bragging, or indiscretion, or bad taste, or impertinence. So the fellows in the smoking-room of the Kemble apparently thought, as they sat and glared occasionally at each other, and sipped their brandy-and-seltzer, or coffee, and puffed their cigars, and looked at their boots and the ceiling, and felt if their white neck-ties were all straight and right.

"What's your idea about the Ministry—think they will go out?" ventured to remark a member to his stranger.

"I really don't know; I suppose they must," was the reply.

"Well, I don't know," was the rejoinder. "I should hardly think they will. Wonderful old fellow, Pam!"

"Very," said the other, apparently not over strong

in politics. "Have you heard what the Admiral has decided about Kafoozelum?"

"No—have you?"

"No!"

"Going to the Warwickshire?"

"I think I shall."

There were two fellows present who knew that the bets on Kafoozelum were decided to be void, on account of an "error" in his age; but they contented themselves with severally looking superior to the speakers, and did not impart the information.

Said the other stranger to his entertainer:

"Awfully good cook yours. I shouldn't think there is a better anywhere; except, perhaps, at the Windham. Do you know what they give him?"

"Well, not exactly. I should think three hundred."

"That's not much, is it?"

"No! I suppose not."

"We give ours four, but we are going to give him five. Old Lord Belleford offered him six to leave the club, but he said, 'No! he had made the club, and he wouldn't leave it.'"

"What a brick! He deserves a thousand."

"What I wonder at is," rejoined the other, "how a man can ever reconcile himself to what you may call a domestic feed afterwards."

"True," replied his entertainer. "I dined with Toppington Somers not long ago—splendid house—only eight guests—no hens, except Mrs. Topp, who is rather fast. Would you believe it, I was nearly poisoned by the smell of the dinner as I went in?—

put me in mind of a burnt-offering; ha, ha! thought what was coming. Dinner rather late, guests all waiting, Mrs. T. smiling, evidently uneasy. Host looking carving-knives, because he was using none. Well, I told them a lively story about a Russian dinner-party, at which every one was poisoned with the soup, by the cook, whose daughter had been ill-treated by a noble—a cook with any *amour-propre* would have done it after dinner in the coffee—saw by expression of Toppington's face, that his cook was a *mauvais sujet*. Well, just as I had finished describing agonies of Russian party, in we went to dinner. Some one had asked me what soup it was that was poisoned, and I answered at a shot *bisque d'écrevisse*. Only fancy my delight when I found that was the very identical *potage* at the head of the table."

"Capital!" said the other; "but you don't mean to say that anybody shied at it?"

"Didn't they? But to tell you the truth, no poisoner of any talent would have doctored such rubbish. It was cold and sticky as glue, and salted! ugh! The next thing remarkable was a splendid Severn salmon; cost ten shillings a pound, if it cost a penny; raw, sir, raw. If I had dined, I should positively have enjoyed Toppington's dismay. The rest of the dinner was equally bad—the 'burnt-offering' turned out to be a saddle of mutton, which might have been baked in Pompeii. As for the woodcocks—don't mention them. Topp completely lost his temper, and everything was as dull as ditch-water or his confounded claret, which I believe costs

the fellow eight pounds a dozen. It finished, however, by his asking us all to dine next day at his club.

"Awful sell!" said the other, rather wearied by the story.

"Wasn't it? But the best of the fun is, that dinner had cost Topp ten thousand pounds, if it cost him a penny."

"Ten thousand pounds!" repeated the other.

"Yes! You must know that he had a snug little place, before he came into a lot of money by his uncle's death, and his little dinners then were as jolly and unpretending as possible. There isn't a nicer creature than his wife in London. But when he got the 'tin,' he declared he should never rest until he had a more commodious dining-room. So he went into bricks and mortar, and built a house—and there it is all gilt, and glare and gas, and French clocks, and modern decoration. This was his first dinner there."

"I'll tell you what," said the other, "there are very few private houses in London, where one does get a decent dinner; and now as it is the fashion to go into flowers and fruit and gimcracks on the table all dinner-time, one might as well go through a Barmecide feast at a florist's from Covent Garden."

"Last summer," said his friend, "the smell of the pines and strawberries under one's nose was enough to take away any appetite short of a navvy's."

"We rush into such absurd extremes in England. Everything is sacrificed to fashion. Only fancy Briggs or Tomkins, or Clark, the retired vermin-powder man, dining *à la Russe* at 'Ighgate or 'Olloway, with sub-

stantial posies in cheap glass contrivances, and hired plants in gaudily decorated flower-pots all up and down the table, and the hired waiter and occasional undertaker's mute with his cotton gloves handing the everlasting flabby brill which does duty for turbot, and the tough boiled fowls, round to the vestrymen and churchwardens, the suburban house-agent, and apothecary from the corner-house of De Beauvoir-terrace, in that exceedingly new neighbourhood. For my part, I don't care what the style is, so that the viands are tolerable; but depend upon it whenever there is pretension, there is discomfort and cold plates. May I offer you another weed? Waiter, the cigars!"

Encouraged by this sustained effort at small-talk, three of the four members of the club, who were on speaking terms, had indulged in a little spasmodic babble about the Opera, and kindred topics. One of these gentlemen was a well-known member of Parliament, an upholder of flogging in the Army, and a strenuous advocate for preventing the sale of small necessities on Sunday. He had lately brought in a bill to shut up all public-houses, and even coffee-shops, on the Lord's Day, and his speech on that occasion was printed in the form of a tract, and circulated "gratis" by the Exeter Hallites. Yet, he knew well that billiards were played on the Sabbath in the Progress Club, of which he was a member, and his small-talk was worse than that of any book sold in Holywell-street, because of the horrible cynicism that he mingled with its pruriency. He regaled his hearers with some very spicy anecdotes with an unctuous

gusto, which contrasted almost diabolically with the ghastly and gelid selfishness of a soul in which all charity was dead, if, indeed, it had ever existed there at all, which we more than question. He described how he had cut a cast-off mistress, who was getting her living as a chorus-singer at Her Majesty's, and who had accosted him, when he had gone behind the scenes in the prosecution of some fresh unholy amour, which was far more a question of cruel bargain and sale than any consignment of Circassian slave-girls to the Turk. Yet you should have heard him denounce all sympathy with Schamyl, and the tribes of the Caucasus, and uphold the execrable aggression and cruelties of Russia, because of this inhuman and un-Christian traffic! He was in the middle of a story, by which he stood self-condemned of an act of cold-blooded atrocity towards a poor seamstress, which *ought* to have excited the manly indignation, had they possessed any, of his admiring and applauding auditors, to kick him out of the room, and break his Vitellius-like neck down the nearest flight of steps, when a fresh couple of "Nicotians" entered the room. In one our readers will recognise the Honourable Fitz-Eustace Swellingham, of the 3rd Blues, and in the other his friend Sidney Snobbington, barrister (not) at law.

Swellingham, or Fits, as we have already learnt to call him, entered the smoking-room with the easy air of a man at home with himself and his position, and nodded carelessly to three or four of the party. He flung a successive glance at each of the strangers, which canonised off them to the wall behind, seated

himself with a kind of apathetic nonchalance, and called to a waiter who happened to be in the room for cigars. Snobbington, who closely followed him, and in whose manner a keen observer would have detected a want of ease and a certain display of consciousness resembling that of a bad actor on the stage, also took an empty seat and a full-flavoured "Habana," as soon as his friend and patron had helped himself.

"Coffee, Snob?" said Fits.

"Yaas," replied that individual. "Can't do without my caffy, you know."

"Thought you'd have preferred a gin-sling," said Fits. "They make capital gin-slings here. I'm going to have one."

"Then I'll have a gin-sling too," quoth Snob. "It's a tip-top thing when you're thirsty."

"Are you thirsty?" asked the other, as if he didn't care to know. "Shouldn't have thought it."

The pair had just finished their second bottle of Lafitte.

"Well, not exactly," said the other; "but a fellah can always dwink a sling, you know, especially when one isn't quite up to the mark."

"Why there's nothing the matter with you, is there?" drawled Fits. "Shouldn't have thought so by the way you walked into the *sole à la Cleopatre*, and nearly finished that wild duck, by Jove."

SNOB. Awfully seedy, my dear fellah. It's veway odd, do you know, but I always eat most when I'm not quite the thing.

Fits looked at his friend with an expression of

calm doubt, mingled with a sort of "permissive-ness," as much as to say, "Say what you like. It doesn't in the least matter." And the twain puffed their weeds in silence.

"In the Park to-day, Swell?" asked one of his friends.

FITS. Yaas; were you?

FRIEND. Yes; nothing talked of but the affair of those wretched Aubreys. I should think the fellow will never show here again.

FITS. Why not? I should imagine he will come oftener than ever, now that his wife is dead.

SNOB. Ha! ha! capital. Just what I was thinking.

FITS. (*frowning slightly*). Do ring the bell, that's a good cweechur. It's close by you.

The truth is, Fits considered it hard that what little thoughts he indulged in should be claimed by his friend; but he had too much good taste to reprove him, save by a tone of voice which the other perfectly understood, and he asked him to ring the bell, in order to convey his disapproval.

FRIEND. Oh! it's not the wife's affair alone, though that's bad enough; but I am told that he is hit devilish hard; gone to the dogs, in short, altogether.

FITS. I didn't know that "tin" was any qualification for this place.

CYNICAL M.P. Deuced considerate of the wife to drown herself, anyhow! They generally stick to a man in difficulties with all the delightful obstinacy for which women are distinguished. They like to remind him of better days, and bore him with their

lackadaisical sympathies, which means reminding him of being better off, like a perpetual skeleton of the past—a sort of affectionate ghost of other days. If this Aubrey is ruined, it is a piece of luck to get rid of his wife; and if not, why perhaps he's luckier still, that's all.

After delivering himself of this club sentiment, the advocate of the negro, and apologist of the Czar, a pirate at heart, but philanthropist by profession, nodded to Fits, and stalked out of the room, either to bully the shrinking mother of his progeny, or to betake himself to some more Malthusian haunt. Pleasure and free-trade before duty and protection was the code of ethics which he practised in this world. He was shortly followed by the others, after they had sufficiently stretched themselves and yawned, leaving Fits and Snob together to their cigars and sling, and such reciprocal advantages as they might enjoy from each other's society.

"I say," inquired Snob of his friend, before any one, save the M.P., had gone, "when are you going out of town? I'm off for a few days' hunting to-morrow at the dook's." This was not altogether false, for Snob had got introduced to the good-natured Chalkstoneville after all, and the result was a gracious command to bring his horses down to one of his grace's hunting-boxes, and have a week's hunting with the Highflyer fox-hounds. Snob would have risked breaking his neck fifty times over for such an invitation, and he had invested in a wonderful silver dressing-case for the occasion.

FITS. I'm going to Parwis on Wednesday; can't

exist any longer in London. (And he yawned as if at the bare thought of such a punishment.)

SNOB. What a doosed bad affair, though, of that fellah Aubrey! Always thought him rather low, eh?

FITS. Never saw such twousers as he waw. Saw him once do a most extwaordinary thing.

SNOB. What was that?

FITS. Horwid old woman carwyng bundle and baby acrwoss stweet, dwopped her bundle in mud, omnibus coming by. What do you think he did?

SNOB. Can't think.

FITS. Must!

SNOB. Can't!

FITS. Guess!

SNOB. (*with sudden animation*). Kicked it?

FITS. No!

SNOB. Poked it with umbwella?

FITS. No!

SNOB. Dem it! Fell over it?

FITS. Try again.

SNOB. Pawsitively can't think what a man who waw such twousers, as you say, would do.

FITS. Give it up?

SNOB. Yaas.

FITS. He picked it up!

SNOB. No?

FITS. And carwid it acrwoss the stweet.

SNOB. Oh!

FITS. He did weally. I thought you would be shocked. Didn't get over it myself till I had dwank a glass of curagoa. Never liked to shake hands with

him after. Always fancied he might have something the matter with his hands, you know.

SNOB. I don't wonder. But I say, Fits, in spite of what that brutal Manchester fellow said just now, wern't you shocked at that horrid suicide of his wife?

We ought, perhaps, to mention that when our friend Snob was very much in earnest he often forgot his kakophemy, if we may use such a word.

FITS. Awful affair! Some fellahs thought her handsome.

SNOB. I never did. Did you?

FITS. Not my style. Besides, she had a catawact, or some such thing, in her eyes.

SNOB. Did you know who she was before he marwied her?

FITS. Not I!

SNOB. A governess; that's all.

FITS. Gwacious me! Then no wonder that she jumped off the brwidge. It's just what they do.

SNOB. So I thought.

FITS. No, you didn't.

SNOB. What do you mean?

FITS. My dear Snob, you've a bad habit, and it's my duty as a fwriend to cawwect it. You're always saying that you thought something I thought. Now, if you do think something I think, there's no occasion to say it. It's very hard if a fellah can't have an idea of his own.

SNOB. Don't be so sharp on a fellow. But, I say, didn't you narrowly miss seeing the catastrophe? How was that?

FITS. Well, I don't mind telling you, but rather not talk about it in future. Had been dining at Richmond with little Montmowency of the ballet, Kitty Dareall, and Harry Luckless. Went to Surwey Theatre after, to please Kitty, who is stage-mad. Horwid place! never go again; drweadful vulgar wrant—put me in mind of little prints of actors spangled with coloured tinfoil in the windows of sweet-shops, when I was a boy—"Alonzo the Bwave" and "Pizarro," with their legs astwaddle, and that sort of thing, you know. Suppose you were a boy once—some people never could have been; simply impawsible, like old Stingway, you know. Well, when we came out, it wained and lightened awfully. There wasn't a cab to be had, and we had to walk. Kitty put her hood over her head, and skipped along like a two-year-old—said she enjoyed it; can't say I did—and the Montmowency was as much afraid of wetting her feet as a female feline party without pattens. Well, on we twotted till we got to the brwidge, which was all boarding and scaffolding, with a narwow footpath just fit for wobbers. Saw crwoud at the other end; narwowly escaped being wobbled by a drweadful person—a female garwotter should say. Sensation-header just over; of course, didn't know who it was—lost Kitty and Luckless. Got a cab at last, and got home. Veway ill all night, and nervous system upset all day; you know a fellah can't help feeling something sometimes. Dined with Aubrway only last week, and saw his wife; didn't think she was so very unhappy; remember a look now. Snob, ring

the bell for some brwandy, old boy. Thank you.

SNOB. Have they found her yet—found the body, I mean?

FITS. Can't say. Haven't seen evening paper—don't want to see it. Oh! here's the veway man I was speaking of. Ask him—he knows everything.

As he spoke the portly form of Mr. Stingray appeared at the open door. We shall continue the conversation that ensued in the first person, as before.

STING. Good evening, Swellingham. Ah, Snob! you here too, of course. How's yourself? as the cads say. Do you know nothing has struck me more forcibly than the quaint expressions of the lower orders. I should think *you* must have noticed it formerly, Snob?

FITS. Stingway, my dear fellah! aw, aw! we were just talking of the melancholy soocide of little Aubrway. If a fellah will marwy a governess, what can he expect, you know, eh? My friend Snob here wants to know if the body is found yet?

STING. Not up to twenty-five minutes past six, at any rate. But these high tides, you know.

FITS. Stingway, my dear fellah! why haven't they a Morgue in London? Capital institution, Morgue in Parwis.

SNOB. Just what the dook said this afternoon—the Dook of Chalkstoneville, you know. “Snob, my boy,” remarked his grace, “I wish we had a Morgue here, and we'd go after breakfast to-morrow morning and see the body.”

STING. They must first find it. I fancy the Morgue is not quite in accordance with the general English taste. We are so squeamish, you know. The British idler, Mr. Swellingham, must content himself for the present with such excitement as prize-fights, and fires, and executions can furnish?

FITS. Do you dine here to-morrow?

STING. No, not to-morrow.

SNOB. Nor I. I'm invited to Lord Phallusby de Haut Ton's dinner.

STING. Indeed; then I shall see you there. That's where I am going.

SNOB. No, I can't go. The truth is, I am asked, but owing to my, aw, dear father's, aw, severe indisposition, I am going to send an excuse to-morrow morning. Awkward, isn't it? Think his lordship will take offence?

STING. Can't say; but pray leave it to me. I have to see his lordship at twelve o'clock to-morrow about a leading article he wants in a certain journal. I'll do it for you. I'll explain to him your filial devotion, eh? and he will, doubtless, soon invite you again. Good evening, Swellingham. Bye-bye, Snob! (He salutes them, and is apparently going.)

SNOB. (*frantically*). No, no! Mr. Stingray! Don't say a word to his lordship, for very particular and private reasons, which I can't explain just now. Don't breathe a syllable, I implore you.

STING. Oh! leave it to me. I will see that you have full justice done to your excellent motive in not accepting the invitation. Was it to-day that your

father was taken ill—I think you said rheumatic gout? Ta-ta!

SNOB. (*rushing after him*). For Heaven's sake, don't, don't, you'll ruin me!

STING. Eh? What? What is the matter? I'm in a hurry. I don't understand you.

SNOB. For Heaven's sake, don't mention me to his lordship. 'Tis a mistake, that is, a sort of mistake. The fact is, I am not asked exactly—that is, to-day; but I expect an invitation soon through a friend, and I wanted to know—that is, I thought if my father should be ill, what . . . what excuse a . . . I could make, you know. You understand, dear Mr. Stingray, don't you?

STING. Hem! yes, I fancy I do. Well, then, to oblige you I won't say a word to his lordship; the more so (*very loudly and deliberately*) because, Mr. Snobbington . . . because, sir, I don't happen to be invited there to-morrow myself—that's all. Good evening!

SNOB. (*following him aside and whispering*). My dear Mr. Stingray, don't tell any one of this little joke of mine; and you know that carved oak book-case you admired so much? I ordered it to be sent to you to-morrow—indeed I did!

STING. Nay, if you would bribe me to silence——

SNOB. Hush! don't use such awfully strong expressions, my dear friend.

STING. As a point of friendship——

SNOB. Enough! a thousand thanks. I can assure you it has been immensely admired. It came from an old moated grange in our family.

STING. If it did, I'm a Montenegrin. I have seen it in Wardour-street for eighteen months at least. I could have had it for thirty-five pounds.

SNOB. I gave fifty pounds, on my honour.

STING. (*aside*). What a lying rascal it is. (*Aloud*.) My dear old boy, to please you——

FITS. Stingway, my dear fellah, before you go, can you tell us any more about these unfortunate Aubrways?

STING. Don't know what you have heard already. I was at the police-office this morning—thence, as Pepys would have had it, to Scotland-yard, where I saw the cloak said to have been stolen by the orange-girl, alleged to be a desperate vagrant and beggar, known to the Force. Poor devil! she got six months for it. Shows activity on the part of our precious guardians, to lock somebody up. She said she only picked the cloak up, and I've no doubt she spoke the truth, though doubtless she was capable of stealing it, had it not lain at her feet.

FITS. Don't believe it, Stingway, my dear fellah; believe she did steal it. She's a female garwotter—nearly garwotted me.

STING. To be sure, you were there! Yes, I heard all that. Well, Aubrey has got a brain fever, which is likely enough to settle his hash. It seems that he opened his wife's desk, and read her letters. Rash thing on the part of any man who wants to live happily with his spouse. He first penned a challenge to Luckless, and then attempted to cut his own throat; but was stopped by a faithful servant, whose wages were not paid up. It took four men to hold

him, and in despite of all their efforts, he smashed a marble washing-stand, and four china cups. Struck with sudden remorse, the unhappy and guilty woman, instead of packing up her jewels, and flying to the Continent, where she might have sued him first, or at least brought a cross action, which, *entre nous*, would not have been a very difficult task, drank a bottle of cyanide of potassium, which had been got for amateur photography, and took a cab to the river. You know the rest.

FITS. This comes of marrying beneath you, just as I said. There never is anything like gwatitude on the part of these low people.

STING. It was no great *mésalliance*. He is only the son of a corn-merchant in the City.

FITS. A pwetty fellah to be so proud!

SNOB. I remember he was once quite wude to me in the Park.

STING. The fool is utterly ruined into the bargain.

FITS. Is that pawsitively a fact?

STING. You know Phil Cousens, the solicitor; wide-awake, kind-hearted Phil?

FITS. Only a little, just to nod to. Snob, here, is intimate with him, I believe.

SNOB. Not I, indeed.

STING. Well, he told me, of course quite confidentially, that it is all up with Aubrey, not a feather left.

FITS. The deyvil, you don't say so!

STING. Don't I? The bailiffs will be in the house to-morrow, if they're not there already.

FITS. Confound it, and he owes me two ponies on Flatcatcher.

SNOB. These upstart fellahs always come to grwief in the end.

STING. (*aside*). That's pretty well for the son of a rag and bottle merchant.

FITS. (*aside*). I wonder what his chesnut horses will fetch. I must set some one on to them. (*Aloud*). I suppose everything will go to the hammer?

STING. To the plate-warmer and the bottle-rack, a leaky watering-pot and a garden besom. There are no children's toys—no family rocking-horse, minus tail and mane. Poor Phil Cousens nearly cried when he told me. Fancy scrofulous Phil in tears. You know why he sometimes wears white kid gloves at dinner, don't you? It's to hide king's evil, though he'll tell you he has just met with an accident and burnt his fingers. That's what his clients do—ha, ha! But you know he was an intimate personal friend of Aubrey's, by whose ruin the firm will be hit hard, doubtless.

SNOB. I should think that ought to touch Phil a precious deal nearer than his friendship for such a confounded low fellow as this Aubrway.

FITS. I used to say it never did pay to be fwiends with your lawyer, but it seems it don't do to be fwiends even with your fwiend.

STING. By-the-bye, what has become of Kitty Dareall? I saw the shutters up at her house to-day.

FITS. She was close by, you know, on Saturday night, when poor Mrs. Aubrway drowned herself?

STING. I am told she has gone into the country in deep mourning, and flung up her engagement at

the Thespis. A new surprise. What a clever jade it is!

FITS. Ha, ha! capital.

STING. The truth of the matter is, she has gone into retirement before marrying.

FITS AND SNOB. Whom? Luckless?

STING. No! (*Places his finger on his lips.*) The Duke!

FITS. What! Chalkstoneville and Acres? Is it possible? Well, I always said it would come to that.

STING. Don't you know that's what she came out at the Thespis for? Well, a man may have a worse mother-in-law than that convenient matron the British Drama.

FITS. I always thought she was fond of Luckless.

STING. *Cela n'empêche pas!*

FITS. To be sure! The duke is only out on parole from his coffin. And then——

STING. Luckless may be in luck! The old boy can leave four hundred thousand pounds to any one he pleases, or who pleases him.

SNOB. (*aside*). I wish I had been a little more attentive to either Luckless or his bride in reversion. But I shall know how to play my cards down at Malcourt Spinnies. (*Aloud.*) As for Aubrway, I shall cut him dead when I meet him.

STING. Mind he don't shoot you dead. He's the best pistol shot I ever saw.

SNOB. That wouldn't influence me, if the fellah's a low fellah. Besides, I never was intimate with him.

STING. No! I believe he fought rather shy of you.

Why, I don't believe you knew him at all; not even a bowing acquaintance. Confess, now. It's too bad to talk of cutting a man you don't know. It's almost as bad as excusing yourself to Phallusby.

FITS. Stingway, my dear fellah, you two fellahs are always chaffing. Can't you leave Snob alone? I'm sure he never hurts any one, and isn't half such an artful old plotter as you are. Are you, Snob? Now don't look so spiteful. Let's look in at the "Wag" together, and hear the last news from India, and if there's any chance of my wegiment being sent out, I shouldn't half mind it; for I'm tired of this sort of life, demmed tired of you, Sting, and Snob here, and all the lot of you. 'Pon honour, I don't believe the niggers are half such a bad lot as some of you London fellahs, after all. (*After delivering himself of this unusually long speech, Mr. Swellingham pulls Snobbington towards the door.*) Stingway, my dear fellah, come along.

STING. Why don't you belong to the "Rag," Snobbington; surely you are eligible? Ha, ha! (*Swell. and Snob. go out.*) It's as well he is out of hearing, for I do believe if he had heard what was at the tip of my tongue, the fellow would have struck me. Why his father was a rag-merchant. Ho! ho! Now who would think, to hear him talk, that he dotes on his old fat greasy mother, whom he surrounds with every luxury, and would do anything in the world for save walk out with her at the West-end; and that, moreover, he is beyond a doubt privately married to that girl of his, and is the exemplary parent of about five or six of the ugliest

little cubs in existence, all with light hair and blue eyes like himself, which some folks would call cherubs? Ha, ha, ha! I must jot down some of this for my next novel. This is the only repayment which I exact from my stupid friends and acquaintances as a compensation for eating their indifferent dinners and being generally bored by themselves. Shall I follow them to the "Rag?" I hate the Army as I do the Irish. No, I'll drop in at the "Dust-hole," and hear what more is said about this affair of the Aubreys. How that woman shied me, to be sure! And I suppose some fools abuse me, because I'm not sorry that she has come to grief.

And the old wretch buttoned himself up as carefully, as if his existence were a blessing to Society, and introduced a story of his own benevolence with such consummate skill at the "Dust-hole," that young Lord Alicompane told his friend, the Hon. Everton Toffey, in confidence, he didn't believe there was such another dear old kind buffer as Stingray in the world, by Jove! he didn't.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

A Familiar of the Inquisition is a joke to him. He is a coarse fiend smelling of tobacco-smoke worse than brimstone. His civilities are insults ; his efforts to be comfortable more atrocious than the license of a gorilla let loose in your home. Yet he may have a heart, a conscience, and a family of small children ; he may have been the victim of legal iniquity himself, and probably compared with the respectable Harpies of the Law who sent him thither, he is an angel sitting by your fireside.—*Characters in Crayon. By Blank Lottery, Esquire.*

WE must now look in again at the Maisonette in Queen's-square. Alas ! the light of the house, the *δύμνα δόμων παρονσία*, as the Greek tragedian has it, blind as she was, had departed, and nothing was left behind but confusion, terror, and despair. Mr. Binsby had requested leave to go away suddenly ; and, in default of permission, we believe that he would actually have taken French leave, as the kind-hearted cook did. "How," said the latter, "wish you that I should remain ? But it is impossible, I tell you. Let us see. There is two months of benefice due. Then, I shall give it to him, to this master, the cruel, the perfidious, who has assassinated an angel, I tell you, an angel. Ah ! I should like to fight myself against him with swords, and avenge that

poor angel. *Mon Dieu ! mon Dieu ! Quelle lâcheté.*" And he packed up his things, and left the house with tears and maledictions, mingled with salutations to the domestic circle. Mr. Binsby, on the contrary, gravely requested to know if his services could be dispensed with. They were, without objection or hindrance. Strange to say, Tops, who was dismissed, remained. Aubrey did not notice it; or, at least, said nothing, if he did. In fact, he kept his room, and when called forth spoke and moved mechanically, as in a dream. For three days he took no sustenance beyond a cup of tea or a drink of water. On the fourth, there came a heavy missive from Spider's-court, Webb's Fields, the perusal of which seemed, in some degree, to wake him up from his lethargic state. At all events, he wrote some answer to it, which was duly sent. It was then the fourth day since the catastrophe, and Susan and Tops were conversing together in the dining-room, where a third person sat in an arm-chair, in the shape of a strange and singularly hoarse young man, with light hair, and of very questionable appearance, who had called about an hour before, in company with a Jewish-looking gentleman, in a light taxed cart. These individuals had driven up to the door, and rung the bell, after first directing a very dirty young Israelite, who sat between them on the trap, to hold the horse's head. The moment the door was opened, they walked in so suddenly, that Susan, who admitted them, was on the point of calling out for assistance, thinking them to be thieves. The older and darker, if not dirtier, man quickly undeceived her, for he dived into a capacious gulf in his

velveteen coat, and brought out thence a huge black greasy pocket-book, whence he in turn extracted a folded paper, which he opened with horny finger and thumb. This was an execution on the goods of Mr. Arthur Aubrey.

"I s'pose it's all right, miss," he said to the frightened and astonished Susan. "Me and this young man, as you'll find werry civil and obligin', will take the hinwentory this arternoon a little later, if you please." Here he whispered to the dirty pale man, who was attired in a dress-coat and corduroys, and wore an emaciated cloth cap, with a long cloth peak, which was somehow connected with a bow of rusty black ribbon, and which gave his head a kind of "snipey" appearance, if we may coin such a word. "I'm agoing round" (nod) "there to the coachus" (wink) "and stablin' " (nod) "as soon as I've picked up Jem Bosky. It's a job as'll suit him. He's so desperate oncivil." (Nod.) "He ain't fit for our business, he ain't. There's no call to be oncivil, cos folks is down in the world. And I have know'd them as has been tip-toppers again, after a little affair of this kind." (Extra double and prolonged wink.) "There, my dear" (to Susan), "don't take on. It's not as if we was goin' to take him, and even that," he said, cheerily, "ain't halways sech a fatal go. Lor' bless yer, yer should see wot I've seen."

"If it warn't for the fammerly misfortin," suddenly cut in the dirty, pale young man, "I should say it was part of a swell's hedication to go through summut of this 'ere."

"Lor' bless hall yer innersent 'arts, yes," said the

dirty dark man to the assembled knot of servants, which now included Tops, the housemaid, page, &c., in fact, all the household, with the exception of Binsby, Monsieur Isidore, and the housekeeper, who was ill in bed with a dreadful nervous attack. "There's a gent as has guv me many a gold sufferin many a time since, as I was put into vith jest sech a job as this. Only it was in chambers, and he warn't a married gent, leastways not then. I shall never forget what a spree we had. Fust of all, he was goin' to show fight. But a friend of hisn put him hup to that being a serious affair, yer see. So his lordship he changed his tone quite sudden. 'Let's 'ave grilled bones,' ses he, 'and lashins of mulled claret, and friend Heiron here,' that was me, yer see, 'shall spin yarns about his hexperience.' There was three young ladies come in from the bally arterwards, and a precious spree it was haltogether. I told him a lot that he never heerd before, you may be sartain; and now that he's a great man in the world, he never forgets to pass a civil word when we meets. Vy, I told him vun story, as cost him a hundred pound to relieve a fammerly, as had a distress in at the werry same time as he had; and he told me t'other day, the werry last time we met, 'Heiron,' says he, 'them stories of yourn are likely to lead to ax of remedgial ledgehislation.' 'I hopes,' I ses, 'my lord, that it's nothin' that'll hinterfere with my business.' 'If it does, Heiron,' ses he, 'come to me, and I'll see that ye're compensated,' says he. So, votever it is, it's hall right, yer see; and that's all along of bein' reasonable and good-natured. My mate here" (point-

ing to the dirty, pale young man) “he’s werry good-natured, and he’ll smoke his pipe vere he’s told, and hinterfere with nothin’ and nobody, ’xcept in the way o’ business.”

So saying, Mr. Heiron politely nodded and winked all round, and rapidly betook himself to the tax-cart, which drove off, “like a flash,” as Susan afterwards said, and left them all standing there *in statu quo*, *plus* the dirty pale young man, who had seated himself on the edge of a chair, after partially going through the pantomime of dusting it with the tail of his coat. As it was his coat which required cleaning, and not the chair, the precise meaning and intention of this process were by no means obvious. The question now arose who should acquaint Mr. Aubrey with this state of things. Poor Susan, who, to do her justice, was plunged in the deepest grief, and whose face was as white, and whose eyes were as swelled and red, as those of Niobe might have been prior to actual liquefaction, burst into a new channel of grief. Tops drew the back of his hand across his eyes, and said he would as “lief never look a ’oss in the face again.” The rest, one and all, declared they couldn’t and wouldn’t go for to tell him on no account—“Not,” said the scullery-maid, “as it ’ud matter what you tell him of now, in a manner of speaking.” Gradually they all melted away to their various duties, leaving Tops, Susan, and the dirty pale young man, who seemed by his manner rather a genial individual than otherwise.

“I’ll tell yer wot it is,” he remarked; “it’s hall werry creditable to this ’ere little society in the way

of feelinx, but the guv'nor must be told wot's up, and that's hall about it."

"Then you'd better tell him," said Tops; with a degree of hoarseness in his throat which sounded as if he had swallowed a woollen stocking.

"Jest wot I was about to perpose, friend drabs," said the other with an air of ineffable patronage. "Let 'buttins' knock at his door, and say there's a party as must speak to him a moment. It'll do him good in the present state o' matters."

At any other time the sole answer which Tops was likely to have vouchsafed would have been to place himself in an attitude of self-defence, and request the dirty pale young man to "come on." But he was too much "beat," to use his own expression, to resent the impertinence of the intruder.

"All right, mate," he responded. "I reckon that's about the way of it."

So "buttins" was summoned and sent up to announce the pale young man, who followed him pretty closely.

Mr. Aubrey heard what the unwelcome visitant said, which he did after his own rude way, but with as much rough kindness as he knéw how to infuse into such an announcement. "Werry sorry, sir, for this 'ere job, but somebody's got to do it, and it might be in wuss hands, you see. I'll keep as much as possible hout of yer way, bein' honly in 'ere on the 'special.'"

"Take this person down-stairs," said Aubrey to the boy, "and see that he is made comfortable."

The pale young man, who had taken off his

“snipey” head-piece, and was twisting it into a variety of shapes, pulled a dust-coloured curl of tangled hair lower over his forehead, and disappeared with “buttins.”

“How is poor master?” inquired Tops of the latter, when they had re-entered the dining-room, where he had remained with Susan.

“Don’t speak of him! Don’t inquire about him!” she vociferated; “he deserves to die—that he does.”

“Jest guv us a light for my pipe, mate, vill yer?” said the broker’s man. “Now I’ll jest tell yer wot my opinion of this ’ere job is. It’s about the best thing as could happen to your master that he is ruined entirely, ’cos he’ll ’ave to vork for his livin’, and as I’ve vorked for my livin’, vy, I knows pretty vell wot it is. You’re a pair of right-sorted vuns, you air, and if your master vants any little think in pertickler, vy the Downy vill be werry short-sighted for vunce, seein’ as how he knows vot misfortin’ is. This ’ere job ain’t in my reg’lar line of bis’ness!”

“Ain’t it now?” inquired Tops, with only partially aroused interest.

“No, it ain’t,” replied the Downy Cove; for the dirty pale young man was no other than our old acquaintance. “I’m ‘put in ’ere special,’ yer see. Now supposin’ you wos jest to fetch a pot of ’arf-and-’arf.”

“Well,” said Tops, “I don’t care if I do. You don’t seem ’arf a bad lot, you don’t; considerin’ the herrand you’re come on. I reckoned you and your pal up, the hinstant you set foot in this house.”

“Did yer, now?” said the other. “Veil, I

shouldn't a' thought it. I'm sure I'm werry much obliged by your good hopinion." (To Susan). "Oughtn't I to be, my dear?"

Susan didn't notice the remark. She was thinking at that moment, whether all her late mistress's little nick-nacks, the screens she had painted, and the chairs and ottomans she had worked, would be sold, and into whose hands they might pass.

Tops nodded towards Susan, shook his head at the Downy, pointed with his thumb in the direction of his own left side, as much as to say, "Anything you like, but no nonsense in that direction." "Her and me," he thought fit to add aloud, "is a-keeping company together. You understand?"

The Downy looked a perfect encyclopædia of intelligence at his new acquaintance. "Don't be afeard of me," he said. "Bless you, I've knowed it this 'arf-hour. As for callin' any young creetur o' the female secks, 'my dear,' it's a way I've got; cos they're hall dear to me, hespecial them as is good-lookin'. But if you're a trifle pertickler, vy I'll put the skid on to please yer, and be as sairymonious as a Jew butcher, or a Lord Mayor's footman on Show Day."

This speech appeared to afford perfect satisfaction to Mr. Tops. As he said afterwards, he was not afraid of any gentleman's attentions, especially in that line of business; but he didn't choose any liberties to be taken, if he could prevent it, which might cause unpleasantness after. Had he observed the proceedings of the Downy immediately after his departure for the beer, it is probable that the un-

pleasantness would have preceded any effort at explanation that might have been attempted. For no sooner had the door shut on Tops, than the "man in possession" advanced close up to Susan, and said, with a degree of familiarity, which deprived that young lady of the power of remonstrance,

"I say, young woman, I've summut very pertickler to say to you."

"Sir!" was all that she could get out.

"I've got horders," he continued, "to hintrust you with a secret, vich I considers rayther a green haction myself."

"I don't want any of your secrets, I'm sure," said Susan; "and I'll trouble you to keep them to yourself."

"Then," responded the Downy, "you're a paragram of your secks, that's all. Now, don't be boltin' away as if I was goin' to bite yer. I ain't got no sich hintentions. Suppose," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper, "suppose that this 'ere missus of yourn ain't drownded at all, and vot's more is likely to rekiver her blessed eyesight into the bargain."

Susan staggered, and would have fallen; but the dirty pale young man caught her round the waist with infinite dexterity. It was perhaps as well for all parties that Tops did not return at that moment. Susan, however, recovered and disengaged herself in a very rapid manner.

"It is false," she cried. "You are jesting. You shall be punished for this."

"Go on!" said the Downy; "keep it hup by hall means. I'm used to it, I am; but perhaps you'll

listen to reason, afore that respectable young man, whose acquaintance I'm proud on, comes back with the beer."

"Did you say," cried Susan, "that my dear mistress, Mrs. Aubrey, is not drowned—not dead?"

"I tell yer, I ought to know," rejoined the Downy, "for I took her out of the vorter last Satterday myself, vich haccounts for this 'ere cold I got. Vy, I'm as hoarse as if I'd left the door and vinder vide hopen hall night, and gone to bed in the hempty fire-grate vith somebody else's vet umberella."

"Oh!" cried Susan, "where is she? Let me fly to her!"

"Hush!" said the Downy, "that's wot I'm a comin' to. She's vell took care of; and don't mean him, her husband, to know nothink at all, leastvays for the present. But bless your bright eyes, we knows wot that amounts to. Howsumever this 'ere is her own vishes, and 'ere's the haddress."

"I will go to her instantly," cried Susan.

"Mind!" repeated the Downy. "Dark is the vord! or you'll spile everythink!"

"And is she well, my dear angel mistress?" inquired Susan, as well as she could for sobbing.

"All serene!" replied the Downy; "that is, the medical gent says she's out of hall danger. I see her on the sofey in a dark room like; for she's took the vorter-cure for blindness, vich it's a werry good imitashun of a myrakle, accordin' to the sawbone's own noshun. And she's kvite sensible, hall hexcept in trustin' another voman vith the secret; for there's vun of 'em in it halready. And a hout-and-hout

stunner she is, fit to make any cove poeticle. I honly vish I was a rich young nobilman for her sake, that's wot I do." And the Downy gave vent to something between a whistle and a sigh.

"Who can she be?" asked Susan. "What is her name, do, pray tell me?"

"There you air, halready," said her informant. "How should I know her name. Besides, that's not in my hinstruckshuns. I knowed how it would be."

"You may, indeed, trust me," said Susan. "Not a word shall escape my lips. But, however did you come in here?"

"Vy, hearin' as there was a hexecution agoin' to be put in, I knowed some vun must 'ave the job, you see, and vith the haid of my bankers and the reckymendashun of Her Majesty's Ministers, the dodge was heasy enough to the Downy. Do I look like a man as vould disgrace his hancestry by such a job, if it warn't on the special?"

At this moment Tops re-entered with a pot of beer in his hand.

"Hush!" whispered the Downy. "Not a vord to him, till you've seen her."

Susan had no difficulty in beating her retreat, without exciting the suspicions of Tops in any way. There was, indeed, nothing very remarkable in her agitated appearance, considering that she had been in and out of hysterics every hour or so ever since the disappearance of her mistress.

"Nice gal, yourn!" said the Downy, noddin' towards the door, as she shut it.

"Rare good un!" was the answer. "Take a drain, mate!" and he handed the beer to the Downy.

The latter blew the froth dexterously into the fireplace, drank, and handed the pot to Tops, who took a long pull in turn.

"I say, young fellow!" he asked, "wot's your opinion of Socierty?"

"Is she a two-year-old filly?" was that worthy's reply. "Don't know the 'oss."

"A werry spavined old hack, I should say," rejoined the Downy. "No! I means fashionerble folk, and hall their surroundins—they as hangs out in 'ouses like this."

"I can't say," replied Mr. Tops, languidly, "that it troubles me much to think about it. There was a party 'ere, but he hooked it yesterday morning, as would 'ave talked to you by the hour about things of that sort. He was our guv'nor down below, and I do believe he thought somethink of this kind was goin' to 'appen. And it's jest as well he is an orf un, for if he had chanced to open the door to your lot this mornin', he'd 'ave had a fit, that's sartain. But you're welcome to your say, jest as well as if he was here."

"My noshun is," said the Downy, as soon as he had finished the beer, for which purpose he waited with great politeness until the other had finished speaking, "my noshun is that Socierty is a kind of huniwersal plant among the nobs to make everythink uncomfortable, and as full of lies as a dog's back is of fleas. And what's more aggrawatin' than Socierty, I should like to know? Jest now I vanted to spit. D'yer

think I ha' ventured to ax that young 'ooman for a spittoon? My eyes! wouldn't she ha' looked at me, that's all? There's no sech thing in the hinwentry of this 'ouse, I'll pound it. Now, bein' a genelman as is hout of Socierty, I didn't take advantage of my persition and spit on this beewtiful carpet, acos I ain't spiteful, and I cares for hothers as vell as myself. Socierty is spiteful, though it don't demean itself to spittoons, and is allers a spittin' on hother people's carpets, and the more wallyable they is, the more Socierty likes it, and, wot is more, it spits nasty venomous pison, instead of good wholesome tobacker juice. How's yer master been haltogether like, since the haccident, young man?"

"Quiet as a lamb, and don't say nothing to nobody," replied Tops; "and considering he havn't had so much as a ounce of grub nor a drop of gruel for three days and hover, it ain't so much to be wondered at."

"Socierty," replied the Downy, "said he had been ravin' mad, and had broke hall the lookin'-glasses."

At this moment the door opened, and Aubrey himself appeared. He walked slowly, and apparently with difficulty. His eyes looked glazed and feverish, and his face was as pale as death itself; but he had made his toilet, and was dressed with care.

"Hush!" whispered Tops. "Who would have thought he was coming down, and we here too?"

The faithful fellow stepped back two or three paces, and saluted his master in a very different fashion from his usual off-hand style.

The latter said, very gravely, "Ah! Tops, my good friend. Good day!" bowed to the Downy, and passed on to a writing-table, where he sat down.

Tops, fully understanding that he was not required to remain where he certainly had no business to be, as quickly as possible shuffled, crab-like, out of the room, and shut the door very carefully after him.

The Downy remained in the room; but retired to the farthest possible corner, where he seated himself in an arm-chair, and continued smoking with great deliberation, until he apparently went to sleep quite suddenly. It is more than probable that it occurred to him all at once that smoking was not quite the correct thing in that apartment.

For some minutes Aubrey remained deeply buried in thought, with his head between his hands. At length he looked up and around him with a semi-vacant stare, apparently unconscious of the presence of any one in the room. Then he muttered to himself, and finally spoke aloud as follows:

"It was here," he said, "that she last sat. That mirror reflected her pale, despairing face. Fool! villain! madman! that I have been. And where is she now—she so fond, so gifted, so impassioned? Oh, Blanche!" (looking round) "ruined too! Ha, ha! I am glad of it. There sits the bailiff in possession. He sleeps. Let me look at him." He advanced towards the Downy, and gazed at him awhile. "How happy he seems! I wonder if he has a wife at home, and is true to her!" Saying this, he walked back to the other end of the room, and paused for three or four minutes. "One short half-hour longer,

Blanche—nay, less than that, perhaps—and we had been happy. I should never have deceived thee again—never! never! And it is now too late—too late!” Here he pulled out a glove from his breast. “I picked this up the night she left. It was warm, as she will never be again. It has not yet lost the mould of her delicate fingers. And they, perchance, are clutched—filled with the slimy ooze and black mud of the icy river, or stretched accusing from the centre of some dank and marshy flat, towards Heaven, in mute witness of my dastardly desertion and idiotic cruelty! Why do I not go mad, or die? It is too terrible to think of! It cannot, cannot be!”

After a few minutes of silence, the Downy rubbed his eyes, and looked up. He then approached Aubrey on tip-toe.

“Guvernor!” he exclaimed. “Ahem!”

Aubrey looked up at him, but did not speak, or resent the intrusion.

The Downy gave a kind of scrape, and continued: “Werry sorry as I ain’t allowed to make myself scarce. Don’t vish to hintrude. Can’t help it.”

“If it is any kindness to tell you so, my good man,” said Aubrey, “neither your presence nor your mission affects me in the least.”

The Downy looked at the wretched being before him, and started. “This is enough to take a cove off his beer, this is,” he said to himself. “I’m blest if it ain’t the werry hidential gent as guv me sech a sight o’ money for goin’ a message not a fortnight ago, the day I fell in vith hall that rum chapter of

accidinx. He's a real game un, arter hall, he is, and if I hadn't sworn to that hangel in creenolean that I wouldn't split, wotever come of this bis'ness, I'd werry soon make his mind heasy. But there's no fear but they'll be all right enough agen afore long. Vy couldn't they settle it with a jolly good row and a kivartern arterwards, like hordinary folks. But the nobs don't 'ave it out in our fashion."

"Do you wish to say anything to me?" asked Aubrey at last.

"Nothink pertickler, sir, at least novays nothink sartain, acos vy, nothink is sartain; but if there's no hoffence in vun like me a speakin' to a genelman about wot don't consarn him, I should like to say a vord or two, that's hall."

"Say anything you please," said Aubrey, "you can't wound my feelings, were you to try, friend."

"Vell," said the Downy. "In course I've heerd all about this 'ere bis'ness"—Aubrey started to his feet—"and wot I've got to say is, that you're a reckonin' of it hall up vithout hevidence, that's hall. Vile there's life there's 'ope, and has for hall the searchin' and draggin', there ain't nothink proved to the contrairy; vy I'd live in 'ope if I wos in your place, vich I means vithout hoffence on vun side or t'other."

As he spoke Aubrey's face showed a variety of emotions—anger, doubt, curiosity—and then relapsed into a vacant stare.

"He means well," he muttered, and then clutching the Downy by the arm, he cried: "Tell me! do

you know anything, that makes you venture to say this?"

How far the Downy would have been taken aback by this sudden appeal remains a mystery unsolved. So deeply was the honest fellow impressed with admiration of Aubrey's lavish generosity, and pity for the agony under which every fibre of his late benefactor's existence was evidently writhing, that we are inclined to think he would have let out the secret there and then, but for an interruption which, either happily or unhappily, occurred at that very moment.

"Arter all," as he subsequently reflected, "I never knew no good come of meddlin' and tattlin'. She'll come round soon enough, and it'll give him a lesson, I dessay, as'll keep him on the keyviet for many a long day to come. Pr'aps I should spile hall by hinterferin' vith her little game."

So it came to pass that the Downy did not reveal the secret of Blanche's rescue.

The interruption which stopped any further revelations on the part of the Downy, at least for a time, was the sudden entrance of a most vulgar apparition, without any premonitory knock or warning. Apparition, said we; it was the substantial identity of Messrs. Grinderby and Cousens's clerk, Mr. Snap, who, with his hat partly cocked on one side of the shiny and pomatumed pimple which he called his head, advanced straight up to Aubrey, who resumed his seat with an expression of pain and exhaustion, and looked at him inquiringly without a word.

"Ahem! ahem!" barked the little lawyer's clerk. "I come from Messrs. Grinderby and Cousens. Mr. Grinderby said I was to bring a hanswer."

And he threw down a thick sealed packet on the table before Aubrey.

"I am unwell, sir," said the latter, with an air of languor, "and at present you must excuse me. You can leave the papers, to which I will attend as soon as I am able."

"Mr. Grinderby said I was not to come away without a hanswer," rejoined Snap, in a rude tone.

"Mr. Grinderby," replied Aubrey, "can hardly be aware—— Pray tell him that I am ill. Good morning, sir."

"Oh! I ain't in no particular hurry. I'll take a seat, till you're ready," rejoined Mr. Snap; as if he had been addressing a decayed law-writer, whose work was overdue.

"Sir," said Aubrey, haughtily, "this rudeness can scarcely be premeditated. Must I repeat to you that I am ill—suffering affliction? To be short" (sternly) "I must request you to withdraw."

"Mr. Grinderby," reiterated the clerk, "said I was not to go back without a hanswer."

"The matter must be pressing, indeed," said Aubrey, wearily. "I will open your parcel."

And he accordingly tore open the envelope, and read a letter enclosed within, as follows :

"DEAR SIR,

"We beg to enclose you our balance of bill of costs, extending, as you will perceive, over a period of four

years, and, as the firm has heavy expenses to meet, request your immediate settlement of the same.

“ We are, dear sir,

“ Your obedient servants,

“ GRINDERBY AND COUSENS.

“ P.S. On the other side we beg to annex copy of letter just received from mortgagee's solicitor, and advise you that unless you at once pay the amount, immediate foreclosure will take place. What answer are we to make ?”

“ What! the interest on the mortgage not paid? I never heard a word of this?”

As Aubrey uttered these words, Mr. Snap indulged in a little feat of whistling, accompanied by sundry kicks against the leg of the table, on the corner of which he had perched himself.

Aubrey, without noticing him, tore open the bill of costs. “ Balance!” he said, “ three thousand four hundred and seventy-five pounds six shillings and eightpence halfpenny! Impossible! Pray, sir——”

The clerk continued his musical performance, not seeming to hear that he was addressed.

“ Do you hear me, sir?” said Aubrey.

“ I should think I did,” was the answer. “ I ain't deaf.” And he took up a photographic album from the table, and began carelessly to turn over the pages. As he did so a portrait fell out.

“ Insolent rascal!” cried Aubrey. “ How dare you pollute that book with your touch?”

“ Well I'm sure,” cried Mr. Snap, “ we air proud,

with a broker's man, too, in possession. Why the book ain't yours, no more than it's mine, which it is perhaps in right of my governors. What am I to say to Mr. Grinderby?"

"Scoundrel!" shouted Aubrey, seizing him by the throat, and shaking him with violence till with one effort he flung him reeling half across the room, where he fell close at the feet of the Downy, who could not resist the temptation of a slight accidental kick.

"Oh! oh!" bellowed Snap. "Help! I call you to witness. He said 'scoundrel!' It's actionable, besides the assault. I'm bruised all over. I take you to witness that he has torn my shirt, and I've lost a stud."

"Tell your master," said Aubrey, "that, were he somewhat less base than he is, I would lash him within an inch of his life. Tell him that if he stole a handkerchief from a hedge, he would be transported as he deserves—ay, fifty times more than the petty thief who preys not on friend or client, but on Society, that spurns him from its breast. Tell him and his partner in iniquity, that not even contempt shall save them, if they dare to annoy me by other means than the law affords them, its meanest and most wretched instruments. Tell them—but I waste words on them, and on you." As he said this he cast a glance of scorn on the still semi-prostrate Snap, and left the room.

"Yah! yah! yah!" cried that personage, as he gathered himself up. "Who are you? Beggar! pauper! yah!" and he was about to execute a little

war-dance of defiance, when an unexpected assailant gave him pause. This was no other than the Downy, who suddenly advanced upon him in a pugilistic attitude with a succession of the most approved feints. Mr. Snap retreated rather more quickly than the other took ground, and gained the door, out of which he made a most unceremonious exit, thereby escaping a kick, about the intention of which there was no nonsense, but which just fell short of the clerk's retreating figure.

"He was never nearer Chancery in his life, I reckon," quoth the Downy. "Blest if ever I keeps a running account with *my* fammerly solicitor agen." And he seated himself in his arm-chair again, and relighting his pipe, puffed the smoke towards the ceiling in an attitude of contemplation and reflection.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR HARRY LUCKLESS'S LUCK.

With the exception of the *genus* Testamentary, there is no body or class of persons in the world about whose approval or good opinion a man need care so little as that of his own relations, except, perhaps, those of his wife. If he is prosperous, he does not want them, although they may him, which does not prevent, though it may conceal and check all the envy and malice which his prosperity, especially if coupled with merit, inspires so pre-eminently in their breasts. If he is needy, their mildest form of malignity and disgust is to disown him entirely, and to ignore his existence. If he is winning fame, they speak of him with derision and contempt; if he has won it, they are the last to yield to what "all the world" has said. If you are eccentric, a relation takes out a commission of lunacy against you; if you don't require it, he sends you baskets of game; if you are in trouble, he disowns you, and furnishes the public with the history of your early indiscretions and bad traits. He is a perpetual witness against your character; and if you have cut him all your life, he intrudes himself at your funeral, if he deems it due to propriety, or imagines you have anything to leave. And frequently the moral intimidation exercised by the mere existence of relations prevents a man from following his own bent, and he sacrifices his happiness on the barren and lugubrious altar of family pride.—*From the Note-book of Solomon Trustall, Esq., LL.D.*

ON a sofa in the back drawing-room of a small but genteel house in Ebury-street, Pimlico, reclined the victim of Aubrey's weakness and wickedness, lately rescued from a suicidal doom. The apartment was partially darkened, and as she lay motionless, with closed eyelids, and clasped hands, her long dark

hair streaming on either side of her, and making her face seem more ghostly pale, and her white dress more white by the contrast, she looked not unlike the monumental effigy of a recumbent queen in some old cathedral nook or corner. Blanche Aubrey had indeed passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Deeply was her conscience impressed with the awful nature of the crime, from the commission of which she had been snatched in so wonderful a manner. The violence of her late excitement was subdued and toned down to melancholy. It seemed to her, as if a long period had elapsed since she left home. She seemed to be born to new ideas, new reflections on life. She felt the utmost indignation, not unmingled with scorn, for the conduct of her husband. But it was something she did not wish to think of, and she sought studiously to banish it from her mind. This was, perhaps, but an effort at mental self-deception, as in reality she thought of nothing or very little else; yet the very exercise was insensibly doing her good. Before her attempt at suicide, she had no idea, no instinct of resistance—now she had a mixed feeling of resentment, disgust, wounded dignity, and a vague desire to “live to see him repent it,” as the phrase is. Again, wonderful to relate, her eyesight had been almost miraculously restored! From the first, her loss of sight had puzzled the faculty. There was no cataract, no blemish, no apparent disease in her eyes. The affection appeared to be a nervous one, and one of the most eminent doctors had declared that her sight might be restored any hour, as mysteriously as it had failed. The very day after

her rescue from the death she had sought after, she became conscious of a limited power of vision, accompanied by excruciating pains, when the light reached her eyes. From that time—about ten days had now elapsed since her plunge into the river—the improvement had been rapid, and the medical man called in by Kate Dareall declared that he entertained no doubt of her ultimate and total recovery. The worthy doctor did not know all; and yet he had discovered a fact which no one else had suspected, and which very much influenced the judgment which he pronounced. He had been simply told that she was a married woman separated from her husband by reason of his misconduct, that she had been blind for some months, and had undergone a great mental and physical shock. Dr. Miller was one of those first-rate men who never emerge from comparative professional obscurity, either owing to want of opportunity, or the absence of all humbug and self-assertion. Had he been suddenly called upon to display his vast knowledge and power of applying it in some celebrated case, his fortune would have been made. As it was, he had a small practice, and it often fell to his lot to do duty for the busy neighbouring medical men, who knew his skill, talents, unassuming character, and strictly honourable conduct. Let it not be thought that Dr. Miller wanted practice. No, he had plenty of that among the poor. As he would say smilingly to his wife, he had as many, if not more, “paid,” than paying patients. He would rise and dress as rapidly at the call of a cabman’s wife, as he would have done at the

summons of an archbishop's lady. He was a bad hand at making out a bill, or sending it in; and when sometimes a poor but honest patient would timidly offer him his fee, he would return it like a blessing, replacing it in the hand that gave it, which he would close with both of his, saying with a gentle smile, "No, not this time, thank you! I think we must get out of town for a day or two, eh? Let me feel your pulse again," or some such words, thereby changing the conversation, and avoiding thanks. Moreover, the doctor had occasion to prescribe a great deal of good port wine with his bark and other tonics; and as his patients were not port wine drinkers, and, consequently, were not likely to get "good" port wine, the doctor would frequently insist upon furnishing his own prescriptions.

"My dear lady!" he said once to a poor creature, who had known better days, and who muttered something about its being too expensive, "expense is not the question, the difficulty is to get it good at any price in these days; and, by-the-bye, singularly enough, I have a little stock at my disposal, which I am enjoined by a gouty patient, who must not drink it himself, to place at the service of my other patients who can; and I can't do better than send you half a dozen of it immediately I get home."

The poor lady began to cry. She read the kind-hearted fiction at a glance.

"Hoot, hoot! ma'am, this won't do," replies the doctor. "I didn't prescribe water with that port wine. Must stop this sort of thing. It's a very dry wine, I assure you — won't bear water. I never could

endure tears; won't come again, ma'am, if you cry; bad compliment to my treatment! must go and see Toole at the play." And he then dexterously got into a description of the last piece at the Adelphi Theatre.

Such was Dr. Miller, of Middle Belgrave-street, Belgravia, though his practice lay in Pimlico, as he often told Mrs. Miller. As he had no family, he could afford these eccentricities, by means of his other "practice," which was that of strict economy.

"Don't you *ever* get out of town yourself, doctor?" said a gentleman of his acquaintance once.

"Oh, yes!" he said, "I was telegraphed for last summer all the way from Gravesend. It was one of the most distinguished incidents of my professional career."

On the memorable night when Blanche disappeared from the fashionable world and her own domestic circle, and very nearly from this sublunary scene altogether, Miss Dareall had conveyed her, after a brief council with Sir Harry, to the apartments of Sir Harry Luckless, in Duke-street, St. James's, which he surrendered for the occasion, and where the actress sat up with her all night. Sir Harry brought in Dr. Miller, whose admirable character Miss Dareall knew, through a friend of hers. Neither Sir Harry nor Kitty, as we will for the present call her, thought of restoring Mrs. Aubrey to her home, until she should be in a state to decide for herself. They knew too well the reason of her rash act. The next morning Blanche declared her positive intention never to return home again. Whilst she

slept, under the influence of some soothing anodyne administered by the doctor, Kitty betook herself to her own abode, and thence to a costumier, and reappeared in an eccentric and dismal garb, very unlike that which she had worn on the previous evening. She then despatched Sir Harry to find apartments, which he very soon did; and, as soon as it got dark the next evening, our new Sister of Charity, aided by Sir Harry, tenderly assisted poor homeless Blanche into a cab, and drove to the retreat they had provided. When the affair of the supposed suicide first got into the papers, without names, Miss Dareall and Sir Harry agreed to endeavour to persuade Mrs. Aubrey to return to her home, or at least communicate with her husband, in time to avoid the full development of the scandal. But they found they might as well talk to a marble "Italy," or any other statue expressing griefs and wrongs. She thanked her kind friends, to whom she said she would not be a burden long. She knew the full consequences of the step she had taken, and was deeply conscious of the offence she had committed in the eyes of Heaven; but rather than return to her husband's roof, she would repeat it. On these occasions she became so alarmingly agitated, that after two or three attempts made by Kitty, they judged it fit not to press the matter further, at least for the present. During the next four or five days the whole matter got fully into the newspapers, names and all, and Aubrey's difficulties were the subject of common conversation.

Blanche said little—whatever she might have felt—

at hearing of her husband's threatened ruin. "Ah!" she observed, "he will miss me now!" And that was the whole expression of her concern. She inquired, however, after Susan with some interest: and when Kitty proposed to bring her to see her, under the strictest bond of secrecy, she did not object. Consequently, the Downy was intrusted with that delicate mission, and we have seen how he performed it. On Susan's appearance, Blanche never said a word about her husband. She hoped that her birds would be fed and cared for; and seemed pleased when Susan told her that Mr. Aubrey had behaved very liberally to an old pensioner, who was accustomed to call for a weekly dole, and who had called, and was terribly shocked to hear of the disappearance of her kind patroness. With the selfishness—let us rather say the bitter necessity of extreme age and poverty—the old woman mingled in her sad "wirrasthrue" the thought of her own sudden deprivation of means. Mr. Aubrey, who had taken to wandering about the house without any precise object, heard her loud wailing, and called her into the library, and talked with her, as he had done with no other person since his loss; and on her getting up, shaking with palsy and excitement, with her rusty black bonnet-ribbons damp with tears, he placed a twenty-pound note in her meagre old talons, and told her that Mr. Binsby would get it changed for her, apparently quite forgetful of the departure of that worthy. "Yes, yes," cried Blanche, "he could be kind and considerate to every one save me."

When Susan arrived, and, after a brief disap-

pearance, reappeared with her boxes, having requested Mr. Aubrey to allow her to leave suddenly on the plea of nervous inability to remain, refusing at the same time to accept anything beyond the balance of her bare wages to that day, Kitty began to relax in her attendance, and for two days previous to the day on which the events took place which we are now describing, and about to describe, she had not looked in at all. In fact, Susan had barely, as she called it, "had a single spy at her." Of course, the attached waiting-woman was much prepossessed in the strange lady's favour; although she appeared in a costume which she couldn't "abear," encouraged no conversation, preferred speaking to her mistress alone, and altogether glided about "as mysterious and unsatisfactory as a ghostess." Amongst other things, it very speedily occurred to Blanche, that she was utterly unprovided with money. Sir Harry had, of course, been entirely kept out of the way, and, indeed, it must be said to his honour, that he had manifested no sort of inclination to intrude himself. As to the romantic passion for Mrs. Aubrey which he had confided to Kitty, it seemed to have evaporated in the most satisfactory manner. The fact is, it had never really existed, save in fancy; for Sir Harry had mistaken sympathy and admiration for love, and from the moment that he saw Blanche in that miserable situation, pity had usurped the place of every other feeling.

It was to Miss Dareall that Blanche was indebted for the trifling expenses which she had already incurred, including a slender outfit of clothes and the

moderate bill of the doctor. But this was a state of things which manifestly could not last; and already Kitty had experienced some difficulty in reconciling her patient and protégée to the acceptance of a bounty, which the former pretended came out of some charitable and religious trust-fund, with which she was connected as dispenser. In vain did Sir Harry press Kitty to allow him the pleasure of furnishing the present means to enable Blanche to carry out her intentions. Concerning this he and the actress had many little friendly arguments and disputes. On one of these occasions, Kitty referred to his declared passion for the lady.

"Ah, now!" he observed to her; "I could not have known what I was saying; for much as I respect and admire her, and sorry as I am for her sad situation, there's no love at all in the matter. I like you better than any one in the world, I do believe," he added; "for there isn't a thing in the world I wouldn't do for you, and I'm never happy the day I don't see you."

"Dear me!" said Kitty, arranging her bonnet-strings in the glass of a little fancy screen on the chimney-piece, "how affectionate you are becoming! You'll be wanting to marry me next."

"Faith! and so I would!" he said, "if it wasn't for my relations. But what would the world say, my darling?"

Miss Dareall made no reply. It would seem that her bonnet-strings were very obstinate at that moment. Sir Harry did not notice how pale her face looked, as she turned round and said gaily, "Well, I

suppose I must have that silly old Chalkstoneville after all. I shall cut your acquaintance then, and all your friends into the bargain, and take to visiting the poor, and patronising pet parsons. What a dear, old respectable duchess I shall make. Why you don't think I should be such a fool as to have you, do you?"—and she laughed harshly—"if all your precious relations were to go on their knees to me together, like the maimed, halt, and blind beggars in a French Catholic church, where the poor and old alone act the part of the devout. Ha! ha! But what *could* the world say that would injure your character?" It was Sir Harry's turn now to grow pale with anger, and fear—fear of having' given offence to Kitty, and anger at her remark. But that young lady hummed a tune, and gave him her arm quite gaily. "Come!" she said, "I want you to escort me to Pimlico, but mind and steer clear o your relations. They are not a very moral lot, are they? and won't deprive you of their valuable countenance for flirting and walking with an actress, so long as you are not in danger of marrying her? Ha! ha! my poor Harry! *I'll* protect you. *I'll* take care you don't forget yourself; or if you do, I promise at least not to take advantage of your rashness."

Sir Harry tried to respond in a similar vein; but the attempt was a failure. He felt that he had made a mistake, and did not know how to rectify it. Two or three times in the course of that walk, and several times after, whilst he continued on familiar terms with Kitty, he very nearly made up his mind to set his relations and the world at defiance, and ask her

plainly if she would become Lady Luckless. And, had it not been for his debts and difficulties, he would certainly have done it; but this weighed him down, and kept him silent.

"If I'd only come into the Kiltroon and Bogmahony property, I'd do it in a moment," he said to himself. "But I can't ask her to marry a bare title, and perhaps have to come and visit me in Whitecross-street, and be searched at the door to see if she was carrying any whisky to her needy Irish husband. No, that wouldn't do at all, at all."

Somehow or other, from the day of that unfortunate conversation with Kitty, the intimacy between them decreased. Sometimes, she was out at unaccustomed hours, and left no message for Sir Harry to follow her. Sometimes, she was surrounded by adorers, and made no distinction, as heretofore, in his favour. And, at last, she actually was denied to him, though he could hear the sound of her laughter up-stairs. Poor Sir Harry! he could have fairly cried with vexation, as he turned from the door, and remembered his fatal speech about his relations; for not one of whom he cared a pin, nor with one of whom was he on friendly terms. He felt as if he could have called them all out, i.e., the males, and shot them one by one with the greatest satisfaction.

"I've offended her pride, and she will never forgive me," he said. Alas! if Kitty could have known what he felt at that moment. But with all her acuteness and wonderful instinct, that was exactly what she did not know. So she flirted with the Duke of Chalkstoneville, with an aching head and

heart, and gradually banished Sir Harry from her door with unflinching resolution, not through pride or anger, but out of regard to her own saddened feelings, into which a higher and nobler consideration entered largely.

"Yes," she said, "he was right. How could he ally his name and fate with one like me? I might, perhaps, marry him, if I continued to encourage his attentions; for I believe he loves me a little. But I love him too well to degrade him by such an alliance."

At that very instant the object of her thoughts was indulging in a day-dream of emigration, in which the cultivation of a farm in Nova Scotia, and the management of a sheep-walk in Australia, engaged his preference by turns. But over both the same Divinity presided, and both the North American and Australian Egeria wore the *espiègle* expression of Kitty Dareall in her sunniest and happiest moments. Sir Harry was an excellent farmer and stock-breeder spoilt. Such a career is certainly preferable to one phase of human existence in this world, and that is the worthless, godless, loveless and useless existence of an idle man on town, that *Bíos ἀβίωτος* of the Greek moralist which fools call *par excellence* "life."

We may here observe that whilst it is sufficiently evident that two persons could hardly have been found even as partners in a modern wedding more utterly unsuited to each other than Blanche and Sir Harry, between whom there was no link of tastes, habits, thoughts, and feelings, it is by no means so apparent

that a match between Kitty and that reckless young Irishman would not have been productive of mutual happiness. They both hated all the common proprieties, conventionalities, and ceremonies of social domestic life. They were neither of them in the least degree regular in any one thing; not even in that most important matter of human consideration, the hours of dinner, lunch, breakfast, or supper. Then, they were both fond of dogs and horses, and out-door exercises. As for Kitty, though, at that period, she undoubtedly set the chief fashions of dress in London, she would have been perfectly happy to get up at four o'clock in the morning to go duck-shooting in the winter, or to preside over a haymaking party in the dog-days, without the slightest concern for her complexion. She knew the Stud Book and the Racing Calendar better than Sir Harry himself, though he would sit smoking and poring over them for hours; moreover, he had a most profound reverence for her genius, and believed there never had been another such a woman in the world; whilst she felt that perfect ease in his presence, and comfort in his society, which she had never experienced in that of any other human being. The fact is, that Sir Harry was the best-natured fellow imaginable, and there wasn't such a thing as an *arrière pensée* in his whole composition. Lastly, she liked him better than any one whom she had ever met. Had Sir Harry told any one of his associates that he was in love with Kitty, whatever else such a one might have thought of it, he would have deemed it the most natural thing in the world. On the other hand, had he seriously imparted his secret passion for

Blanche, as he did to Kate, to the best friend he had in the world, that friend would have laughed outright in his face, just as if he had avowed a hopeless attachment to one of the Royal Family, or to the incarnation of charity and feminine heroism who shares the Imperial throne of France. It was not in the "eternal fitness of things," to use an American expression, that Sir Harry should adore Mrs. Aubrey; it was that he should be "sweet" on Kitty Dareall. But somehow Sir Harry did not see how the matter really lay at first, himself. He wanted to shoot Aubrey, partly for his cruel treatment of his wife, and partly, had he analysed his own feelings, on account of his pretensions to Miss Dareall; and he thought he must be in love with the injured wife, whom he panted, with all the peculiar chivalry of the Lucklesses, to avenge. There was a great deal of simplicity in Sir Harry's character. He was just sufficiently educated to pass current as a gentleman; but books and polite information were by no means his forte. He was, however, an accomplished sportsman, danced "like an angel," had an elegant figure, and a handsome, naturally rakish-looking face. When you were most inclined to be angry with him for some Celtic blunder, or gross instance of unpunctuality, for which latter quality he was so noted, that some one said of him, he could not even have been born at the time expected, there was something in the tone of his voice, and the look of his blue eyes, that disarmed you of all resentment. Sir Harry had been a victim in his time to many a designing rogue; but his good-natured, easy credulity was as great as ever. He had, however, the strongest

aversion to lawyers, and everything connected with the execution of the law. His whole sympathies were with debtors and not creditors. He would have shot a bum-bailiff without any remorse, or a registrar of the Sheriff's Court, or "any such blackguard," as he would have called that necessary functionary, with positive delight. His father and grandfather had been great duellists in their day, and the latter had challenged the former, and posted him as a coward for not fighting his own father!

Such was the stock from which Sir Harry Luckless came, and if he was not a man of business it is hardly to be wondered at. He inherited the famous saw-handles and all the taste of his ancestors for polite duelling, with a remarkable tenderness of heart and a gentle disposition, which caused but few to suspect what a hero at ten paces was lost, owing to the degenerate manners of the age, in that effeminate-looking young man, whose career remained, perforce, unembellished with a single "affair." Had he known the state of his own heart, we suspect he would have discovered there a considerable amount of devotion to Miss Dareall about that time, and certainly, as we have more than hinted, he was by no means indifferent to that eccentric young lady. But Sir Harry was famous for never knowing anything very correctly, not immediately connected with dogs, horses, the "Racing Calendar," and field sports, and consequently he did not become aware of the depth of affection of which he was capable, until the opportunity was lost. But we must not anticipate our tale.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KATE DAREALL SWOONS.

A very pitiful lady, very young,
 Exceeding rich in human sympathies,
 Stood by, what time I clamoured upon Death;
 And at the wild words wandering on my tongue,
 And at the piteous look within mine eyes
 She was affrighted, that sobs choked her breath.
La Vita Nuova. Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

WE left Blanche lying on a sofa in the small dark back drawing-room in Ebury-street, Pimlico. Sad and tender fancies were chased in succession through her brain by bitter and resentful thoughts, like wounded deer pursued by fierce wolves or relentless hounds. All the dread reality of her hopeless position occupied her mind. What should she do—how repay her kind benefactress? Yes, she must again eat the bitterest bread of servitude, that which is earned by the educated and intellectual poor from the sordid and soulless rich. She shuddered as she thought of the Grimshaw family, and what she had endured at their place. Poor Blanche recalled her happiness in leaving that abode with Lady Courcy, a beloved and blooming *fiancée*, soon to be the bride of the man whom she worshipped with all the fervour of a virgin

heart. Surely never was so bright a prospect darkened, clouded, and ruined, and in so short a time ! And for what and how ? Not by the stern mandate of Death. If worldly ruin had come to her husband, it had come self-sought ; and had he been stripped of everything in the world, would that have destroyed her happiness, her love ? No ! As it was, he had simply ceased to love her, and shown it with every aggravation of insult and contempt. Why had he sought out and wooed her, to deal with her thus ? And now, with shattered and enfeebled frame, and without hope, she must begin that fearful struggle again. Moreover, she had another anxiety, another drawback ; one that would interfere with her wherever she went. The blessing she had once so earnestly prayed for, had arrived, changed by circumstances into a curse. Poor Blanche ! There are thousands in this world who have felt all that you did, and more—the victims of pitiless circumstance and chance. As we write, what stories we could unfold ! What fair women are trodden down in the mud and mire of the world—what noble men struggle and starve and die ; unpitied, save by those who cannot aid them. If their circumstances were only known to the rich and idle—but they cannot be ! This is called in modern mechanical slang getting “ out of the grooves.” This is a mechanical age, and there are not sufficient grooves for all, at least in England under the legislation of our political economists, who have knowledge but no wisdom. Of the numbers “ out of the grooves ” in this, and we suppose in every “ civilised ” country, we pity most those who can boast many rich rela-

tions ; because the latter are careful not to let them starve or die without an ill word. They say of such a one, that it is no wonder he has come to a sad end, and of another who has battled hard with destiny, that no one could have expected it to be otherwise.

Poor Blanche ! It is indeed a hard fate to have known prosperity, and to have remained unspoilt by it, and to be suddenly thrown again upon your own resources to earn the crust of dependence, or to starve. At this moment, how many share your fate, with even less power, less chance, and less experience than yours ? How many widows and orphans of brave soldiers who have died for their country, have been mercilessly plunged into ruin by the machinations of scoundrels, who laugh at the impotency of our laws to punish them, and triumph in the reluctance of Society to reject them, or to cast them forth, because they are rich ? Some of these malefactors may even have purchased seats in Parliament with a portion of the proceeds of their plunder. They, at any rate, are not very likely to legislate against the financial speculator, the fraudulent director, or the religious contractor, who has ruined thousands and made himself safe. Blanche Aubrey was not thus cast upon the world. She was the victim of one man's folly and perfidy. She had known poverty before ; but it was when she had hope, and heart, and youth. She was still young in years ; but she had undergone a mental and physical blight.

Still something, she felt, must be done. She did not fear toil in one sense ; because she had now nothing more to fear. She had endured all ; yea, even

to the bitterness of death. So she thought of all things she could do, or might do—she would advertise in the newspapers. Yes, she would ask her kind friend and protectress to do that for her, and perhaps, ere very long, she might be able to repay all. Since she had been there, every luxury had been supplied to her with a lavish hand—fruit, flowers, even a piano had been sent in—all this very much against her will, and her entreaty that no expense which could be spared, should be incurred. Yes, she would consult her and ask her to advertise, not for a situation as a governess or companion, but for pupils. She would teach music, vocal and instrumental. What if she were recognised as Mrs. Aubrey! She would disguise herself, cut off and dye her hair, and in the plain unbecoming dress she would wear, she trusted none would know her. Oh! if she could only go abroad, or even to some provincial town, and thus avoid the terrible ordeal of revisiting places and seeing persons familiar to her during her brief career of fashion. Amidst all this, was not Blanche grateful to Providence for the restoration of her sight? How had she welcomed that inestimable boon? Yes, on her knees she had thanked the Almighty for His gracious mercy. Her restored vision had been baptised with tears of gratitude and thankfulness to Heaven. She had even reproached herself for the want of the extreme joyous fervour with which such a blessing should have been received. Without it, she must have been lost—must have lived in abject misery during the short time she would have burdened the world, supported by some public charity, an inmate, per-

haps, of the workhouse. It was too terrible to think of. But out of that great and unexpected mercy, no art of which she was mistress could conjure a thought of happiness, a dream of joy. Thus lost in sad reflection lay Blanche, gazing almost as blindly on the ceiling, through her eyes ever and anon suffused by tears, as when she was deprived of actual sight. There are geysers in Iceland, that isle of wondrous phenomena, deep and sullen shafts piercing the bowels of the earth, which are dead and silent when unprovoked and unchallenged by the curious traveller or idle passer-by. Let, however, only a pebble or a bit of wood be flung into the mysterious depth, and then far down a troubled groaning, like the throes of some mortal agony, is heard, until ere long the boiling torrent surges forth, and scalds and blisters all within the reach of its spray. Thus it is with the buried existence of a great and hidden grief. The slightest token, the most trifling memorial, awakens all its violence. A sound, a scent, a dead leaf, a written scrap, a chance word, an unbidden thought, and the secret springs of sorrow are touched. Then the long sigh and the convulsive sob, the thrill of agony, the suppressed shriek of a quickened remembrance, until the fountains of visible tears fill and overflow, and the pent-up feelings of misery are relieved. At length the heaving bosom subsides, the chords and sinews of contention slacken, and the exhausted frame sinks into forgetfulness and rests for awhile, until some new and possibly trifling event creates at once the remembrance, the agony, and the relief.

Blanche had thought and wept, and wept and thought, until she had fairly exhausted herself, and her eyelids closed in sleep. We are fond of alluding to the dreams of the actors and actresses in this drama of real life. He who at some time in his existence has not bent with trembling and reverential wonder before the ivory portals of Dreamland, is a man of figs or figures, with a soul worthy of a grocer, and the imagination of a petty arithmetician. He has no romance, no poetry in his composition; nor has he been the hero of adventure, nor the toy of fate. A romantic soul is as necessary for the experience of adventure as a plodding disposition for the small felicities of a retail trade. It is as inherent in one man to meet with strange events, as in another to do common things. Thus a man's temperament is in one sense the creator, not the moulder of his fate. We do not profess an absolute belief in supernatural visitations, nor do we withhold our belief. And why should we withhold it, since we can account for nothing? All our wisdom cannot fathom the instincts of a savage, nor gauge the sagacity of a dog. Everything is a phenomenon, if rightly considered. We can preach sermons on life and death, philosophise on a cabbage, and distil the rose's scent; we have our Polytechnic Institution, our Rosse's telescope, our Pharaoh's serpents, and we can resolve mortality into its chemical components. But we cannot see before the cradle or beyond the grave. Our vision opens on the firmament in which we measure the distances of the stars; we tread on a round globe, and shoot electric sparks of conversation

under the ocean that divides the land, over the mountains and valleys of the once populous Atlantic, of which a dim and confused tradition remains ; but we live between two curtains, two veils, which no mental projectile has penetrated, and which no mortal eye has pierced—the veil of birth and the veil of death—clouds that have never rolled aside at the bidding of any enchanter's wand, before which the imagination of a thousand mortal ages has sunk confused and baffled, died and lived, and lived and died again, as wise as yesterday and the day before, no wiser to-morrow perchance ; but of this none can predicate—for if we could, we might know all. “Give me a fulcrum,” said the great old materialist, Archimedes, “and I will place a lever that shall move the world.” “Grant me a single premiss,” says the latest metaphysician, “and I will account for all.” If eternity be a truth, there is no beginning, and can be no time. For if we start from beyond a beginning, the beginning can never be overtaken even in thought.

All this commonplace—for we do not affect the shallow incomprehensibility of the great philosophers of the age—has arisen out of our suggestion that the dreams of sleep may have a connexion and a purpose in relation with our one great waking dream. That the supernatural or transnatural dream is of rare occurrence, proves nothing against our theory or supposition. For after all, it does not amount to a theory, which would infer a mathematical basis or support. We only start a fact. Let others shoot and stuff it, or cook and swallow it, if they please. There are gross and common dreams, if anything is

common ; for even an onion is a wondrous bulb, especially when preserved in the mummy of a crocodile or ibis, after having been worshipped at Ombos or Tentyra. There are dreams arising evidently out of material effects upon the sleeping body. Thus a dream may be produced by a secret sound or touch. This has been reduced in some degree to practice. We mean by way of experiment, and are not alluding to penny or sixpenny dream-books, and the practice of the ancient or modern Egyptians. But we allude to those fantastic and partial revelations of troubles and joys to come—seldom, alas ! the latter, and of things concurrently and contemporaneously happening far or near, and without visible or material communication, such as we have known, and such as many of the more highly-wrought and imaginative and spiritual of our fellow-creatures can testify to have occurred within the sphere of their own experience.

As Susan entered the room tip-toe, she actually found her mistress smiling with an expression of that which is called “seraphic” content. It is clear that in the popular conception, at least, the seraphs are not bored by the constant repetition of a good thing. At that moment Blanche imagined herself to be leading her husband, who seemed quite naturally to be blind, and whose sightless orbs were turned to her with confiding affection, out for a walk in the warm sunshine among crowds of people. Everywhere she saw flowers and kind faces. She thought Lady Courcy came by, radiant and joyful, and placed something in her hands. It was Arthur’s

wedding gift of diamonds and pearls. Then she fancied they were in Paris. Suddenly they met the Emperor and Empress, who stopped and spoke such kind and touching words she felt she should never forget them in her dream; but the little she remembered when she awoke resembled a fragment of the "Lily and the Bee," or half a sentence on the traditional memory of music by Mr. Beresford Hope. The Emperor detached an order from his uniform, and, borrowing a pin from Eugénie, fastened it on her husband's coat. It was the Japanese order of the "bons maris"—and this her own, her adored blind Arthur had deserved! She would have responded, but words failed her. Then the magnificent music of the united bands of the French army pealed forth around the Exhibition organ of 1851 the strains of "Partant pour la Syrie," which, without any apparent stop or audible transition, changed to "Vil-lkins and his Dinah," and so undoubtedly it did, for with a deep-drawn sigh she burst the bonds of sleep, and saw Susan bending over her with affectionate solicitude, and heard a street musician grinding the very melody that had been magnified and sublimated, not altered, in her dream.

"Oh, Susan!" she cried, before she had quite collected her ideas, "I was so happy; but tell me, have you any news of your master? I have had such a singular dream.

Encouraged by this permission to speak of a hitherto forbidden topic, Susan went ahead.

"Lor', mum," she said, "I saw Mr. Tops this morning, and he says master is so changed, so pale,

and in such a state of desperation, we're afraid he'll do himself a mischief, if you don't forgive him, and go home. He thinks he's been and caused your death, and it quite preys on his mind like; as for that matter, it's natural it should. Oh! do forgive him, and I'm sure he'll never behave wrong again."

"He will never have the opportunity," said Blanche, coldly; "so far as I am concerned. I trust that his depravity will not carry him so far as to cause him to deceive any other poor victim. But I think at present he is more likely to be deceived himself."

"Dear me, mum," rejoined Susan, "suppose he was to marry some other woman, and you not dead after all, why you'd be guilty of causing bigamy."

The idea of her husband marrying again was a home thrust; and for a moment Blanche quivered under it. But in a moment she regained her apparent calmness.

"If Mr. Aubrey were to contract a second marriage," she said, "I should never interfere. I am dead to him."

"You make me quite shudder, I declare, mum," rejoined Susan, who was determined not to lose the opportunity of talking on a topic hitherto forbidden to her. "You may say so now, and no wonder, considering all. But it's my opinion you'd be very sorry some day, for all that's been done."

"Never!" simply rejoined Blanche.

"Not if master really repents?" asked Susan.

"Repentance! what is that?" asked Blanche.

"If I am not now that which I dare not think of, much less mention, was it not through the bravery and devotion of a poor creature who owed me no love or care, and yet perilled his life to save mine? And if I were now a disfigured corpse, as I might be, but for that gallant act of one whom, a fortnight ago and less, *he* would have spurned from his horse's bridle, or his street door, whose deed would it have been but my husband's, of him on whom I bestowed all my affection, all my heart? Speak no more of it, I beg of you."

"But, mum," persisted Susan, "you know what the doctor said; and would you have your child without a father, and him married, perhaps, to some one else? That's what I've been thinking of ever since."

Blanche crimsoned to the ears, and then became as suddenly pale; and her face grew like the twilight sky, when the sun has suddenly disappeared behind a bank of clouds, so cold, and grey, and ghastly in its sternness.

"If I have a child born into this world," she said, slowly, "it shall never call him father. I will work for it, live for it, die for it, if need be; but it shall never know him, nor be called by his name. I tell you I could never believe, never trust him again; his oaths would seem like dicers' falsehoods, even were they true; his repentance like meanness added to crime. If he could give me reparation, full reparation, I might listen to duty, could I choke the loathing which sickens my very soul. But he could not, I tell you, he could not. There is no way, no method, no

possibility ; and I do not wish that there should be. And now I order you to be silent on this topic ; that is, if you still regard me as your mistress."

" Oh, mum !" cried Susan, who had been sobbing during these last words, " don't be angry ; but Tops and me was talking, and we were saying how happy you might both be yet. Couldn't you live, now master's ruined right out, in a little cottage, ever so small ? Don't you remember that one we saw at Merton, last summer, quite smothered with white roses, which master said looked as if it was just married to the farm-house close by ? Master would work at writing, and we should want for nothing, and Tops would dig in the garden without a farthing of wages ; and if he didn't, I would never speak to him again."

" Do not cause me to appear harsh and ungrateful, Susan," replied Blanche ; " but if you wish to continue to visit me in this humble abode, never speak to me of your master again. I tell you once for all, that I am, and I wish to be, nothing to him. I tell you that he cares for another—why do you force me to speak of it ? Do you not know it as well as I ? Be silent on the subject, if you have any regard for me, henceforth, I tell you, and for ever."

" I'm sure," whimpered poor Susan, " I meant all for the best. I don't believe—he'll ever go—after that—wretch again. I know he hasn't since—you left—and all men—that is, all gentlemen—are apt to forget themselves some time or another—at least so—I have heard say. I'm sure—he loved you best—

only he didn't think of it as he had ought to have done—all the time—— Oh! how that knock at the door startled me. I declare I'm that nervous! Shall I see who it is, mum?"

Mrs. Aubrey nodded assent, and Susan left the room.

"She means well," said Blanche, musing aloud; "but cannot see that she only inflames my wound. I wonder if this is my kind protectress who has called."

Here Susan reappeared.

"The strange lady, mum," she said, "wishes to know if she may come in?"

"I should think so, indeed," replied Blanche. "Pray, beg of her to enter at once."

Susan obeyed her mistress, and at once ushered in a veiled and cloaked figure, in whom the reader will, as her most particular friends and admirers would not have done, at once recognise the airy and volatile *débutante* on the boards of the Thespis Theatre; the plague and worry of the managerial existence of Methusalem Wigster, Esq., comedian and sole lessee; the ruling divinity of the Duke of Chalkstoneville; the chastiser of Lord Eppingforest; the model of fashion, but not the pink of propriety; the thorn in the side—if all tales were true—of the Archbishop of Middlesex; in short, that irrepressible, eccentric, and perverse young lady, whose vocation it was by turns to charm and shock the world, and who rejoiced in the popular sobriquet of Kitty Dareall, actress and lady at large. Had she acted only half

as well at the Thespis, as she commenced the interview on this occasion, we may fairly assume that she would have had a great career on the stage.

As she entered, Blanche, still weak and tottering, advanced to meet her, and would have clasped her with outstretched arms, or kissed her hand had it been extended. But the mysterious visitor drew somewhat coldly back. As she did so, she cast a quick look, or, rather indicated a look by a gesture, towards Susan.

"Leave us, dear Susan, kindly, for awhile alone," said Blanche.

The waiting-maid obeyed with an alacrity she would not have shown towards the richest and proudest lady in the land. Alone with Blanche, our novel Sister of Charity, or whatever she called herself, entreated Blanche to recline again on the sofa, while she drew a chair to her side. We shall now proceed to narrate the conversation that ensued in the first person, a plan which we have before adopted in the course of this history.

KITTY. I have ventured to intrude this last time to offer what poor counsel and services I may.

BLANCHE. Oh! madam, you are indeed my guardian angel. Will you not tell me at length by what name I may call one to whom I owe so much?

KITTY (*in measured accents*). I have no name. I am one of a community who seek to repair their faults by acts of charity towards their fellow-creatures of the same frail sex. The debt you owe me is one which I have long owed to others and to Heaven! (*Withdraws her hand from the attempted clasp of*

Blanche.) Do not be offended, lady; we do not give our hands; we try to offer our hearts to the unfortunate, in the atonement of our own misdeeds. (*With a more brisk and cheerful utterance.*) Your physician tells me that your sight, so miraculously restored, is now greatly improved. He assures me that the cure will be both lasting and complete. And, now, may I venture to speak freely to you, and explain the full purport of this visit?

BLANCHE. If not, dear madam, I were indeed unworthy of all that you have done. I trust that my strength may soon be sufficiently restored to enable me to do something for myself; it will not be for the first time. Before I married, I was a governess, one of a sad and often heart-weary class. It was in this capacity that I met him whose faith was pledged to mine.

KITTY. Your husband has suffered deeply; he is expiating his folly by anguish so intense, remorse so exquisite, that even a heart like mine, closed as it is to love, blunted to sensibility, and dead to the world, pities the horror of that remorse, the intensity of that anguish. Dear lady! extend that forgiveness to him which Providence has bestowed upon yourself. You have regained your sight—believe me the scales have fallen from his eyes also. He loves you and will devote his future life to repair the wrong.

BLANCHE. Spare me, I pray you. There can be no love between us now. To repay your kindness, what would I not endure? But this. Ah! pardon me, I implore you. If you knew the loathing that the very thought inspires!

KITTY. It will pass away as easily as false love. But you loved him truly, fondly. Nay, I know it well. And now, too, there is something else that should plead for the offender, that makes reconciliation more necessary and imperative. Will you deprive your unborn child of a father's care and love? Never! You will forgive him, and return to him again.

BLANCHE (*who has risen, and with passionate gesticulation*). Never! My whole soul rebels against the thought. Believe me, my forgiveness is his. In the wildest moments of my delirium, when I approached the parapet of the bridge, with the love of my whole being flung back upon my heart, with my brain on fire, and every nerve quivering, like those of a wounded animal escaping from its torturers, then, even then, I forgave him freely, and my last prayer to Heaven was not for my own trembling soul, but for him. I forgive him now; would work for him, pray for him, die for him if need were; but not live with him. Seek not to probe offended womanhood, to conquer revolted love. I tell you that there are mountains between us. Seas might not wash the remembrance away. Knowing that we shall be apart, I can think calmly, even affectionately, of him. But when I entertain for a moment the thought of reunion, it chokes me, and I cry aloud, "No, no! Death rather! the bridge again rather! the cold river and the rushing tide!"

KITTY. I implore you, do not distress yourself thus. As a woman, I understand your pride; but should

not a *wife* forgive? Think not that I would palliate an offence which the world allows us to condone so readily, but never pardons on our side. Yet there is happiness linked with forgiveness in your path. Do not spurn it, but stoop, I entreat you. It is a husband who, prostrate with remorse and grief, implores you from his solitude to return and to forgive.

BLANCHE. I *have* stooped—have bowed my head in daily neglect and nightly sorrow. Oaths, blows, cruelty I would have endured; possibly smiled under. You do not know all. Listen! Had he been lured astray by some accomplished siren, who, meeting him in society, had momentarily flattered his vanity by her simulated devotion, and dazzled him with her accomplishments and her charms—there are such beings, are there not? vampires in the guise of angels, who start up on the path of married life!—had this been so, I might have forgiven, might have tried to forget it in the renewed vows of a second courtship. I might, I say; I do not know. But *this! this!* To leave me for a wretch, a monster, steeped in infamy, emblazoned in profligacy, an incarnate plague-spot in the shameless forehead of the town. Madam, madam! you do not know. The insult doubled—trebled—by his choice of a rival. “Rival!” the word sickens me. The degradation superlatived, embellished before the world. Oh! it is too much—too much! Listen! I was deserted day by day for one branded, posted in capital letters; known to all, through an effrontery rare even in beings of her degraded calling, as that which my lips refuse

to repeat. I see you shudder and start. Well may you do so!

KITTY (*much agitated, and with a great effort*).
Continue—continue!

BLANCHE. In the affliction with which I was visited, he left me, to shower gifts at the feet of this foul idol, this vulgar and unfeminine Circe of the swinish and brutal throng. Shame on him! Shame on him! I had a favourite horse; I could not ride her lately, because I was blind, and could not see the falsehood in my husband's eyes, when he deceived me with stories which grew stale in repetition, and excuses whose invention became monotonous in wrong. It pleased the neglected wife sometimes to caress the horse she could no longer ride. But he placed that—that—woman, on poor Leila's back, and doubtless she looked well, and he admired her; for her accomplishments (*sarcastically*) are all masculine. Yes, I am told that she rides boldly. I think I see her jewelled whip striking my unconscious horse. The noble creature did not fling that fair burden into the mud. No! no! I am not jealous. I could not be jealous of such a rival. She has not even the attraction of outward beauty, they tell me; but what of that? Well, madam, do you now ask me—abandoning all the dignity of womanhood, all the sanctity of love, all that which even man respects, or pretends to honour, when he is pleased to assume virtue—to sink into that husband's arms again? No! no! it cannot be. It is not jealousy—it is not anger—it is not revenge. It is justice, life, exist-

ence—it is glory to remain apart! But I have shocked you too much with this narrative, so repugnant to your feelings, so detestable to your heart. Pardon! pardon! I have heard your sobs; you are touched, indeed, with the recital of my wrongs. Let me aid you! You are ill—faint.

KITTY (*who has dropped her veil, falls back in a swoon. Blanche aids her with tenderness, and puts a glass of water to her lips. She partially recovers*). I will have no more wine, your grace. I will go home. Take me hence.

BLANCHE (*looking fixedly at her*). She is very youthful. Yet I see traces of suffering in that delicate face. She said, “your grace;” who can she be? She is patrician in every movement and feature.

KITTY (*regaining her consciousness*). Where am I? (*To Blanche, who has left her a moment to get some restorative, and who is about to support her again.*) Touch me not with a finger, if you would not have me die. (*With a great effort.*) I am subject to attacks like this. Our mission is a trying one, sometimes. My poor head is aching sadly, and my heart, too, aches—for you, so innocent and so unhappy. I thought that marriage—you are married, you know—made it a duty to a wife—a wife, Mrs. Aubrey—to forgive much, very much. You have, indeed, much to forgive. But do not measure your husband’s offence by the character of her, who—who—I am not well to-day—perhaps did not seek to allure—no matter. I hardly know what I am saying. Nay, leave me to myself. I shall be better very soon.

BLANCHE (*aside*). Poor lady! How wrong, how selfish I have been. Doubtless, she, too, has had some trials—perhaps a husband—who knows?—who has deceived her also.

KITTY (*who has recovered her self-possession*). Well, let us think what I can do to serve you. How do you propose to live? for we cannot eat and drink our wrongs, or exist upon our own sufferings.

BLANCHE. I studied in Italy nearly two years. I was once intended for the opera. As a young girl I shrank from the publicity, the dazzling foot-lights; the very thought of gaining the applause so coveted by all, appalled and frightened me. Now it is different. Should my sight be perfectly restored, as the doctor assures me it will, my heart tells me I shall not fail—my will assures me of success. True, I have not the means to study at once, or even to repay you these expenses. I propose, therefore, at once to seek employment as a teacher of music. Can you add to the benefits already conferred by your generous aid and true-hearted sympathy in assisting me to get a pupil or two, to start? If I fail in this, I know not what will become of me. If in a year or two, I can, with the most rigid economy, the hardest toil, lay by enough to study a brief time, I will, I must succeed. Yes, something here (*presses her hand on her heart*) tells me that I shall!

KITTY (*aside*). 'Twas once my own dream. She is beautiful and virtuous. Ah! how much that last enters into the composition of the true artiste, the

realisation of a glorious ambition. Yet she is his wife, and I would they could be reconciled instead. And she loved him—loves him still. What can compensate for that? But 'tis in vain! How placidly beautiful she looks now. If she knew who it is that speaks to her, how those nostrils would dilate, those eyes kindle into flame! It would be her death. I must depart—must not come here again. The risk is too great. (*Aloud.*) Lady, I have the power to fulfil your wishes. From a fund, a pure and sacred fund, believe my solemn word, I can supply you with ample means. You need not shrink; need not hesitate to accept it, I assure you. The necessary introduction for your purpose I can also manage, through my connexion with the outer world, which is still great and varied, and will be hallowed by the purpose, for which—probably for the last time—it will be used. In the mean time, your secret is safe. You shall hear from me very soon. Adieu! Nay, no thanks, not a word—no embrace—no hand. I am the mere instrument of a duty. I would bless you, but must not. Our community does not bless! (*Gazes at her very earnestly for a moment*). You will succeed, and some day be happy. Farewell! (*She goes out*).

BLANCHE (*alone*). Mysterious being! generous and kind friend, whose very features have been but once fully revealed to my aching sight, yet whom I love as a sister! Were I not bound to her by the sacred ties of gratitude—were I not indebted to her for existence, and hope—such hope as is left to me in

this world—I could have loved her for the sweet fascination of her voice alone.

Re-enter SUSAN.

SUSAN. Oh! mum, the strange lady is gone. I met her sobbing quite dreadful-like on the stairs. I would have stopped her, but she put me aside, and was gone out in an instant into the street.

BLANCHE. May Heaven for ever bless and comfort her, Susan; for she has known some bitter wrong!

CHAPTRR XIX.

A PRESENT OF NAPLES SOAP.

During my brief incarceration, I was much struck by the kind attention of an under-gaoler, with red hair. This man supplied me with a coarse napkin, whilst I partook of the greasy messes brought to me for food. He pressed me to put on a rough sheep-skin overcoat, which he said I should sleep in much more comfortably than in my tight uniform. As the nights were cold, I thankfully acquiesced. He cleaned my accoutrements, scraped the mud off my boots, regarding them afterwards with great apparent satisfaction, and brushed me as carefully as a Parisian valet. I felt grateful to the fellow, until the order for my release, through an exchange of prisoners, having arrived, the cause was duly explained. It appeared that, after my intended execution, this amiable Judas was to have inherited my clothes.—*Reminiscence of Count — during the Italian War of Independence.*

ARTHUR AUBREY sat alone in the little library of his house in Queen's-square. Torn letters and papers strewn the ground at his feet. The "man in possession" allowed him every license in his power, and intimated that he "wasn't pertickler to a shade, with a gent as was a gent." Aubrey was too honest, too proud, and too indifferent, to take advantage of this license, which strict probity might condemn. He satisfied himself with his desk, containing papers of no value save to the owner, a portrait of his wife, the photographic album which Snap, the lawyer's

clerk, had desecrated, and one or two trifles endeared to him by memory. These he had conveyed to a lodging which he took in Percy-street, Tottenham Court-road, where he intended to take up his abode in the course of a day or two. There, once resided a hearty and right genial soul, for some time the favourite of the public, a prince of good fellows in his way, whom every one liked, who never said or did an unkind thing, and who exercised the high and beneficent privilege of amusing the multitude with straws. Poor, dear Albert Smith! England could better have spared a more profound thinker, a more utilitarian philosopher than thou wast in thy brief day. What if thou didst only chronicle the lighter follies of the hour—what if thou didst extract fun from out of a solemn mountain, snow-capped, and glaciated and crevassed within its cloudy robe—what if thou didst somewhat vulgarise Mont Blanc? What if thou wert only the great chronicler of the harmless race of “gents,” whose name thou didst popularise, if thou didst not originate the term? A man who innocently and harmlessly amuses us is a benefactor to his fellow-creatures. It was more than an ordinary loss when lately Artemus Ward faded untimely from sight, and the inimitable Bruton’s jests were silenced in the grave. The genuine dealer in mirth, like the comic actor, is the friend of all. There is a bond of universal sympathy in laughter, as well as tears. Would it be any disrespect to thy memory, O Smithest of the great family of Smiths! to tell here one of the best classical bons-mots we have heard, which was made apropos of one of thine own smart dodges

to tickle the fancy of the British public? We think not. Well, then, this most rollicking genius of Mont Blanc, upon one occasion, presented a small silver coin bearing his own effigy, looking somewhat like the bust of a Roman emperor, thereon, to all the visitors present at the opening of one of his entertainment seasons. On the reverse was merely an announcement by way of advertisement of the Egyptian Hall. Upon which this inscription was suggested in our hearing :

ALBERTUS MAGNUS REX GENT-IUM.

And so he was, and a right merrie monarch too, beloved not only by his own people, but by those who did not acknowledge his sway. He was historian, high-priest, and king of a new race—a class not possessed of much refinement, taste, or manners, but still very distinct from the race of “snobs.” For a “gent” may have the best of hearts and the kindest of dispositions; he may have the courage of a lion, in spite of his vulgar or comic exterior—his manners may be all wrong, but his heart may be in the right place; not so with the “snob,” i.e., in our understanding of these modern slang terms. The “gent” in our apprehension is merely the plebeian “swell,” the “snob” is always a “cad,” but he may be an aristocratic cad.

From Queen’s-square to Percy-street, Tottenham Court-road; from the height of fashion to the depths of disgrace; from at least the appearance and all the enjoyment of prosperity to penury and strife with want! And this, too, unarmed and unequal to the contest! Such was the future which Aubrey had to

look in the face. He happened to have a small balance at his bankers, when the distress was put in, just five hundred and sixty pounds. This he immediately drew out, when he saw the truth staring him in the face, that he would shortly have no means left. He saw partly through Mr. Grinderby's game. That worthy had determined to avoid a sale, at least, at present, though he hoped yet by a clever manipulation of the affair to purchase the property in conjunction with a "friend" and capitalist. He had an immense idea of its value and mineral wealth. *En attendant*, should that scheme fail, he had so arranged matters with the persons named in the entail of the estate in case of Aubrey's forfeiture or death without issue, that he had got them to consent to a suit in Chancery, whereby he should be appointed legal representative of them all, and receiver to the estate. His intention was so to depreciate the property and accumulate charges, that it should eventually come to the hammer, when his friend would step in and purchase on their joint behalf. But even if this daring stroke of genius could not be effected, he saw his way to a very pretty income out of the property. Besides, he hated, and, according to his view of things, despised Aubrey. We cannot say that his client was entitled to any honest man's respect; but still he was not so lost, so low and degraded, as really to merit the contempt of Grinderby. Imagine a centipede which had crawled up the pitfall into which some maimed creature infinitely superior to itself had been betrayed by folly or rashness, and we have some idea of the relative positions of the lawyer and his ruined client.

Grinderby could afford and did afford a great deal of heavy sentiment and bitter condemnation about poor Blanche Aubrey's supposed fate. He was never tired of shaking his wicked old iron-grey poll like a venerable moral jackdaw, whilst uttering with harsh reiteration: "Sad thing, sad business, very!" Then he would say: "Of course we could not continue to conduct the business after poor Mrs. Aubrey's shocking death. Some persons imagine that we lawyers are devoid of feeling, and so perhaps we ought to be, but there are limits even to legal duty. Our loss may be heavy, but the reputation of the firm must not be endangered, and, thank Heaven! we can afford to be still men." Here the snuff-box would come into active play.

And what did Aubrey, the ruined client, the man at whom the finger of scorn and hatred was pointed on every side, mean to do? The most bitter of his denouncers had been the most profligate of his associates and advisers; the men who had sought to entice him away from purity and bliss to the haunts of sensual depravity; who had laughed among themselves at his domestic devotion, whilst it still existed; who would have poisoned, if they could, by their brutal sneers and insinuations, alike the wife's confidence and the husband's content; who would have betrayed her and shot him, if they had dared, and if they could: in fact, the most vicious and depraved of the set who had crowded his rooms and extolled his cook, who had flattered his gentle partner's beauty and his own taste and spirit—these were the persons who now wagged their tongues longest and loudest

in moral acrimony and virtuous disgust. Then the women—how they discovered that “there had always been something very odd about that wretched Mrs. Aubrey!” It was amusing to hear a hideous old hag, the widow of an Indian general, who wore a gipsy-hat at the seaside, and whose scraggy shoulders and green flowery adornments at evening parties in town caused Mr. Stingray to compare her to a shoulder-of-mutton bone half smothered in parsley. This lady declared, with a leer of ineffable affectation, there was something in Mr. Aubrey’s eyes, that she had always noticed when he looked at her, which no modest woman could endure. As this was a suggestion that he had cast an amorous glance on her conscious charms, those to whom she addressed it tittered at the notion, whilst by no means entirely exonerating him. There was, doubtless, “something in it,” they thought, or said. There was a Scotch woman, of some forty autumns, a M’Taggart of M’Turk, who declared that he ought to be hanged for having murdered that “puir young thing.” “If I’d been his wife,” she said, “I’d have taught him a lesson,” and doubtless she would. Yet this very woman, so respectable and religious, had actually at one time, utterly unable as she was to fathom the deep love or comprehend the purity of Blanche, conceived the notable project of a little dinner at her house in Clarges-street, whereat the Duke of Chalkstoneville and Mrs. Aubrey should be thrown very much together indeed. It was to be on a day when Aubrey attended a race, or was otherwise absent from town. What could have been that

worthy dame's precise intention? It was somehow connected with a fifty-guinea diamond brooch and a very handsome Genoa velvet dress, in which she fancied she saw herself arrayed as a consequence of this little exercise of hospitality and friendship. The duke told her that he should be very happy to meet Mrs. Aubrey whenever Mrs. M'Taggart pleased; but somehow Blanche had no particular fancy for the Scotch lady's voluble brogue; and, without the slightest suspicion, constantly declined the overtures "just to dine in a freendly way, ye ken, some day when you are left alone, my dear, which I'm thinking you are a wheen too often; but it's like a' the men, as ye'll be feending out some time or ither, when a' your braw youth and good looks are gone, my puir dear young leddy."

But all the malignity and triumph of Aubrey's worst enemies and ci-devant friends were nothing to the exultant hatred of Mrs. Pushforte, his aunt by marriage, whose manœuvres we have before chronicled. There was not an insinuation or a calumny that this woman and Mrs. Blewbore did not invent and circulate. The husband of the latter, who held a Government situation, and who was a small poet of some popularity, the author of a "Dirge to Ocean," which might have been composed on the steps of a bathing-machine at Margate, and which had been set to music by an "eminent composer," had been a great admirer of Blanche, and had written two songs, one called the "Blighted Lily," and the other the "Blind Wife of Babylon," which were supposed to allude to her. The poor bardling was greatly hor-

rified by her untimely death, and was about to plunge himself remorselessly into the agonies of composition, to produce a "Dramatic Fragment" on the event, when his poor little soul was suddenly nearly shaken out of him by his wife's terrific denunciation of the "Lost One," which was the intended title of the fragment. Poor man! he was actually confined to his own room for a whole week after, and we shrewdly suspect cruelly deprived of pen and ink all the time. Mrs. Blewbore declared to all the frequenters of her soirées that the "governess," meaning Mrs. Aubrey, had been no better than she should be, when she was a governess, and had lived with that profligate Arthur Aubrey, before they were married. You should have heard that sallow and slimy woman tell this over and over again to all her particular pets, from the gaunt female Egyptian traveller, Miss Peagrim, who had once been prisoner among the Arabs, but whose reputation* was as unsullied thereby as a thistle of the Hebrides is unwithered by the Eastern simoom, to the red and freckled young Scotch poet, M'Crawlery, who wrote such sweet æsthetic songs on the invisible slum-life of Whitechapel. Our readers will, doubtless, recollect those beautiful poems of his, the "Crackit Flower-pot," and "Battersea Park, a Reverie," which were so justly extolled in the "Centipede," in an article placing the author on the same

* So, doubtless, the Arabs would eagerly have affirmed, even had she herself accused them of rudeness.

pedestal with Burns in regard to genius and style, but far superior to him as a moral teacher.

On the other hand, Mrs. Pushforte, whose true antecedents we have had occasion to mention in the preceding volume, informed her associates that Aubrey had been one of the worst characters in early life she had ever known. As an instance, she mentioned that he had actually smoked a cigar on the afternoon of his mother's funeral! This, we believe, was strictly true; but she did not add that smoking was such a habit with that heartless libertine, whose attachment to his mother was one of the best traits in his youthful character, that he would probably have done as much on the road to his own execution, if he had been able to procure the means. But the horror of the amiable twaddlers whom she acquainted with the fact, was none the less poignant.

Had Mrs. Aubrey died, as she was supposed to have done, the victim of her husband's libertine heartlessness, and had he remained rich, or become rich by some suddenly inherited wealth, what a different verdict would have been given by Society, and his friends! We do not hesitate to say that he would have been exonerated by the majority of Society from every charge. We have known a far worse case, in which singularly enough Profligacy has alone withheld its consent from the general verdict of acquittal, whilst the severely moral and decorous have been the first to rally round the polluted and sensual Cræsus, and to stand his sponsors openly in the eyes of the world. Extremes meet socially as well as politically, and the ultra-saint and

sinner find a bond of alliance, just as the ultra-democrat and despot cotton together in their hatred of the intelligent institutions which limit the power of the tyrant and restrain the fury of the mob. The model country nobleman and the Rhadamanthus of Quarter Sessions, and their wives and families, unite to rehabilitate in county estimation the heartless and godless voluptuary who has exhausted his passions, but retained his colossal fortune. The most exemplary father and mother offer him their daughter, as some benighted heathens proffer their children to the blood-stained idols of a hideous superstition, or as virgins have been offered to monsters, according to the traditions of the classical world. After all, what more hideous superstition ever existed than the reverence paid by mankind to wealth? Men, who worshipped Garibaldi, when he came over here, begin to talk of him with an air of patronising pity, because he refused the substantial gifts of Fortune and remained in poverty; because he would not accept the "wages" of respectability and the pompous alms of aristocratic sensation-mongers—"The poor dear old General," they say: "it is a pity that he will speak and write." They forget how little he writes and speaks, and how gloriously consistent his utterances are. They hear that he keeps a cow or a donkey the less, and they touch their foreheads and say, "After all, there was something wrong here!" How can they continue to bestow their worship on a man in a red shirt, who grows his own vegetables! They do not, it is true, apply this to Cincinnatus, nor to the disciples of the

Saviour. If they did, they would necessarily conceive Judas to have been at least a commonly prudent and worldly man; one whom modern appreciation would prefer for a partner in the City, a bank director, or a clerk—a man of business and figures—and not a poet, a dreamer, or a fool. If the hero who has survived Aspromonte should happen to live too long; to survive the new-born liberty of Italy, or to be put aside and forgotten in the triumphs of commercial regeneration; if Italy should suddenly become a great business country, is it too wild a speculation to imagine him lacking bread in his extreme old age, a second Belisarius in all save the quest of charity! The forgetfulness of a nation is so easy; because how is any one to know that a hero is dying of want, unless newspapers announce the fact; and somehow dying heroes do not write to the “Times” to proclaim their wants, and the *Deus ex machinâ* generally proclaims them too late. Had even the case of Lady Hamilton been ventilated in the contemporary Press, we do not suppose that she would have been left to perish in want of the common necessities of life. It is a dangerous experiment for any one to be without money in this world. How much more true and stringent is this in its application to private individuals, mere broken spend-thrifts, whose only hold (God help them!) is on relations and “friends,” and on those whom they have feasted and benefited in former days! Had Arthur Aubrey been rich, he would have been able to set truth and scandal at defiance; since he had committed no crime punishable by the law. As he

was poor, a conscience void of reproach, a career unstained by a single vice or folly, would not have saved him from blame. Under the circumstances, he had a double crop of bitterness to reap. Yet it was this which saved him. The desperation of a hunted animal caused him to accept the struggle for existence. He felt that his punishment was in living, and he lived on.

During the brief time that he remained in the house in Queen-square, he underwent two remarkable visits, among those of a host of duns, curiosity-mongers, and pretended friends by whom he was beset. Strange to say, he received most of these. For it was one of Aubrey's peculiarities of disposition to dislike being denied to any one who sought him. It was only when a penny-a-liner, a sort of outsider and hanger-on of the Press, who disgraced the noble profession to which he belonged by a multitude of little cadging and disreputable acts, had gained access to him, and asked half a dozen questions, each of which was as a stab, before Aubrey discovered his drift, that he determined to subject himself to this distressing ordeal no more. But we are bound to describe the two visitations to which we have referred, because one is so characteristic in its truthfulness, and the other is essential to the development of our narrative.

When Aubrey owned the magnificent yacht which had come to grief, after a brief career of inutility and expense, he also owned a solemn, respectful, and respectable steward, who had never sailed with any one under the rank of a baronet before. In the

short space of two years, he realised in Aubrey's service such an addition to his capital, that he would then have retired *into* "public" life; that is, taken a first-rate hotel in a sea-port town, had he not been tempted by a very agreeable and lucrative offer from a nobleman to proceed to the Mediterranean for a cruise. In this capacity he had remained a considerable time, and had at length commenced business at Brighton on a substantial scale. Aubrey had always considered this man in the light of a rather confidential and trustworthy servitor, capable of defending his master's interests from the attacks of others on sea and land, while thoroughly taking care of himself. He looked upon him, it is true, as a very expensive servant; but then he had accepted him as such. He believed that he would take large percentages, and even defraud him, according to respectable usage and precedent, after the manner of his "cloth." He had ruled supreme over the yacht establishment. He was a sort of man who did not put a bottle of wine on the table twice, if it did not suit him to do so; and who treated all ideas of economy with an air of such superb contempt, that you could not possibly have imagined all the time that he sold even the candle-ends when in port with the most exemplary regularity. There was nothing too grand for his master's loss; nothing too small for his own benefit. Cakeman, for such was his name, was eminently respectable, and pre-eminently a gentleman's servant in his deportment. The manner in which he said, "I think, sir, we are running short of champagne. There is not more than ten dozen left. If you will

permit me to suggest that it would be as well to lay in a fresh stock," was sublime. Or, for instance, "Are you aware, sir, that we have only six silver salts? It looks very bad at a full table. Lord Dunsinane never had less than twelve in use." For the rest, Cakeman was an admirable valet when on shore, and the way in which he would regulate and lay out his master's wardrobe was delightful to see. He did not, certainly, abstract articles of dress, when he considered that they had done sufficient duty to their first owner; but he said, calmly, "I've removed the blue frock-coat," or "I've put away the last dress suit, sir. It wasn't fit for you to wear. The other which I ordered from Pond's came home last night." There was no withstanding this coolness, after a man had once yielded to it, and Aubrey had done so, and continued it to the end of the chapter. For the rest, Cakeman was an excellent sailor in every sense, cool in storm and danger, serene and self-satisfied, bland, and altogether a most creditable personage at all times. That man would have shaved clean between the shocks of an earthquake, and laid the cloth for dinner with an unmoved countenance by the light of a general conflagration, so long as his own arrangements remained undisturbed. When Aubrey gave up yachting, or when yachting gave him up, he parted with this treasure of a steward. Had Cakeman been on board his vessel at the time, it is possible that she would never have been wrecked. But he was in London with his master, when the sailors, one by one, following the example of the captain, slunk on shore, and left the vessel exposed

to the fury of a chance storm, and a storm did chance, with only a single anchor and about thirty fathoms of cable out.

He expressed himself with such respectful regret on leaving, that Aubrey gave him an extra ten-pound note. He thought Cakeman's voice trembled as he bade him adieu; and when the steward, smoothing his long-shore hat, as if to allay the itching of his respectable palm, said he had a request to prefer, Aubrey listened with the utmost condescension and interest to that somewhat bald and very prosperous-looking man. Cakeman respectfully intimated that he should like to become the proud possessor of a fine oil-painting of his master, which used to adorn the saloon of the yacht, and which had been saved from the wreck. He hoped he should not be considered bold and presuming, but Lord Dunsinane and Sir John Skyscraper had both given him their portraits on leaving—he did not state that the one was a crayon sketch, and the other a duplicate silhouette, done on Brighton Pier—and he should always hang it up whilst he had a humble place of his own in the best room in the house, in recollection of the many happy days he had spent in Mr. Aubrey's service, with pleasure to himself and, he trusted, with satisfaction to his employer. To be brief, Aubrey felt flattered; and Cakeman gained a good furniture picture for the hotel, besides a valuable evidence of the esteem in which he had been held whilst enjoying so excellent and lucrative a berth.

Soon after the hotel was opened, he had occasion

to come up to town, in order to lay in a large stock of Cape wine, in order to form the basis of his extensive and varied cellar. So the faithful fellow thought he would take the opportunity of calling on one or two of his old patrons, and among them on his former master, Mr. Aubrey. He soon found out the bearings of that gentleman's affairs, and felt chagrined, though by no means surprised. For Mr. Cakeman had often told his wife, the sole depositary of his most important observations and secrets, that somehow he didn't think Aubrey's career would be a prosperous one very long. "It's my belief," he would say to that elderly and grasping female, "that he's spending his capital, and he's got a rare bad lot about him."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Robert, that's what you oughter," observed the lady.

"Perhaps you'll tell me for why, Mrs. Cakeman," responded this chrysolite of stewards.

"You don't make half enough out of him," she said. "Look at your family; look at the boots and shoes the girls want, and the clothes the boys wear out. And you might do almost anything you please."

"I tell you, Mrs. Cakeman," quoth Respectability, glowing with honest emotion, "that I've a character to lose, and I can't sail nearer to the wind than I do at present. Why I've took away coats, as I may say have scarce been worn; and look at the wines and groceries I've brought ashore in the marketing-baskets, and with the dirty table-linen, this very

week. I've made more in a week out of him, plain mister as he is, than I've made in a month out of his lordship, and it isn't many that could work the oracle as I did with him. I believe you wouldn't be content, if I was to fetch home a waggon loaded with the plate, and would blow me up if a mustard-spoon was missing out of the list. You'd like to send me back for it, wouldn't you, now?"

And Cakeman indulged in a sort of laugh which he never allowed himself out of the privacy of his domestic home. It was an article, that laugh, which he might be said never to take out with him at all.

"It's my opinion, Mr. C.," said his better half, sharply, "that you're no better than a fool."

"Thank you, my love," returned the gentleman; "I suppose that's gratitude for getting leave yesterday to change all the blue satin sofa-coverings and what not in the after-cabin, after dirtying them near the joinings with the least possible loss of material when they come to be workéd up again."

A mollified expression immediately took possession of the lady's ample face.

"You don't mean to say it?" she rejoined.

"Don't I?" replied her lord and master. "I tell you what, Mrs. C., that job is as good as a twenty-pound note to us any day, and all straight and serene, and without the slightest possible risk. There's one thing I won't do; not for you, no, nor the children neither, and that is to get into trouble, when there isn't any call for it, Mrs. C."

"Well," replied the lady, "all I've got to say is, that it's very aggravating to hear how a paltry hum-

bugging lot like his friends are cutting it fat, when we are obliged to earn our money with such trouble and difficulty. But of course I don't want you to put yourself in any danger."

"And I'll take care I don't," said Mr. C., as he filled a yacht wine-glass with yacht port. "Anything in reason that I can do, I'm sure I don't grudge the trouble, and I don't see what more you've a right to expect."

It was the afternoon of the third day of the distress, when Aubrey was informed that his old steward, Cakeman, was below, and had expressed a strong wish to see him. "Let him come up," said Aubrey; and accordingly Mr. Cakeman made his distinguished appearance. He was a trifle fatter, balder and greyer than he was some three years and a half ago, but looked in "excellent health and spirits," and as much weather-beaten and bronzed as he was capable of becoming, even under a tropical sun.

"Well, Cakeman," said Aubrey, "what is it? I fear there is nothing that I can do for you. You have heard, I suppose, of my—misfortunes. Take a seat!"

"No, sir, thank you," said Cakeman; "I've just returned from a long cruise, sir; been at a many places, where we was, sir, in the Mediterranean and all along the coast of Spain. I've been in Sir Charles Filey Bart's schooner, *Pelican*, only ninety-five tons; nothing like your vessel, sir, but very roomy forward. Sir Charles's two daughters was with us, sir, very nice young ladies. We went as far as Naples.

We were six weeks at Naples at our old anchorage, sir, and it made me think of you and the vessel, I can assure you, very often. I'm sorry to hear things are not going on quite right, sir; but I hope it's only a bit of a gale, and that you'll come all right again under double-reefed topsails, sir; excuse me for being so bold."

"No, Cakeman," said Aubrey, mournfully; "things will never come right again."

"Don't say so, sir," said Cakeman. "I've known many a gentleman taken aback, and they always came right again. When I was with young Lord Sevens-themayne, we were actually boarded by a 'silver arrow,' and his lordship was locked up at Gravesend; but it all come right again."

Aubrey shook his head. "You are a good fellow, Cakeman, and you mean well," he said, wearily; "but what is it I can do for you?"

"Nothing, sir," said Cakeman; "I only called to see how you were, sir; I've heard all from Mr. Tops. I've set up in the hotel line, and if you should come to Brighton, I hope we shall be able to make you comfortable. This is the card, sir, if you'll allow me. When I was in Naples, sir, I bought a little trifle of soap, sir, and if you'd be so condescending as to accept some, I should feel very proud." Here he fumbled in his coat-pocket, and brought out a white jar, apparently a shilling jam-pot, converted to this Neapolitan use. "I thought of you when I was there, sir, as I said, and knowing how remarkable partial you used to be to this sort of soap, I thought I would bring some over for you, sir, that's all."

So saying, Mr. Cakeman deposited his burden on the table, bowed, smoothed his hat again, and turned to leave the room. Aubrey did not even pause to wonder at his own pronounced predilection for Naples soap. He felt touched at this little remembrance, and said in a husky voice :

“Stop, Cakeman! I’m sure I’m much obliged to you for this remembrance of me. It is very creditable of you. I thank you much.”

Cakeman had the door-handle in his hand. He turned round and said :

“Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, there was a little matter, a mere trifle, sir, which I may as well take the opportunity of mentioning, as I am sure—indeed—you would wish.” The hesitation was caused by a search in his waistcoat-pocket. “I shouldn’t have done so, sir, I assure you; but Mrs. Cakeman said she knew you would be angry, if I didn’t. It’s a little bill for repairing the saloon chairs after the wreck: I paid it, sir, at the time. It’s a mere nothing, only eight pounds eighteen and six. It’s receipted all right, Messrs. Sawder and Stickem, in the High-street, if you recollect. Of course, sir, any time will do to suit your convenience, and I shouldn’t have mentioned it now, but that I’m short of money to go back.” Here Mr. Cakeman looked steadily at Aubrey, and continuously smoothed his hat.

We remember in our youth being shown over a beautiful little church in Wales by a dean’s lady, in the month of July. We had, of course, doffed a white silk hat which graced our brow in those days, and we were gently smoothing the same with

ungloved hand, whilst admiring a particular painted window, on the beauties of which the dean's lady dwelt. Suddenly we felt a little roughness and consequent obstruction to the smoothing process. We pressed our hand over it more forcibly. At once a sting was darted into our flesh! It was, O ye tutelary deities of the ancient Britons! a wasp which had settled on our head-covering. Never shall we forget the look of horror cast on us by the dean's lady, on hearing the involuntary expression which escaped our lips. It was——; but no! the remembrance of the sting will hardly excuse the repetition of the words which caused that churchman's better half to recoil with terror and affright.

There are some men who would endure even a hornet's sting without an alteration of countenance under similar circumstances. Cakeman was one of these. The look which Aubrey flung at him was utterly lost. "If it's not convenient, sir," he began to resume with the most perfect deference; but Aubrey had already taken out a ten-pound note.

"You can send the change up by my servant," he said. "That will do. Good afternoon. I am obliged to you for this visit;" and he turned his back to walk up and down the room.

The grey eyes of Cakeman twinkled with pleasure. He had scarcely hoped for the money, since he had heard the narrative of Tops. It was, therefore, an unexpected haul. He paused a moment, to think if he could claim anything else; and then said in the softest, clearest tone, as if he had been announcing luncheon to an invalid:

“You’ll find the soap excellent, sir, quite genuine, I assure you. I bought it in the Toledo at Ricordi’s myself.” And he bowed very respectfully and went.

In paying the rascal, Aubrey had acted semi-forgetfully and mechanically, as it were. He had been so accustomed to honour all Cakeman’s bills. The meanness and trickery of his attached old steward occurred to him instantly; but in his indignation he forgot his circumstances for the moment. Swallowing his resentment, however, he rang the bell, and Tops appeared.

“Is that scoundrel gone?” he said; “if not show him to the door instantly.”

“He let hisself out, sir, by the hall-door,” replied Tops. “I didn’t think he meant no good,” he muttered to himself, “the moment I set heyes on him. He said he’d brought master a present of some soft-soap. It’s jest the very hidetical article I should ’ave thought he dealt in.”

“Tops!” said his master, “I don’t wish to see any one else, whilst I remain here, and to-morrow I am determined to go. I wish to pay you your wages; I can only afford to give you a month in addition. I am afraid that any character—I can give—just now—will be of little use—you understand; but go to Sir Harry Luckless—he is a kind-hearted man, and will do all that is necessary.”

“Beg your parding, sir,” said Tops; “but I’ve saved a little money in your sarvice, and I was goin’ to ax you to take care of it for me jest at present, till things changes a little.”

“Pooh! pooh! you silly fellow, what do you

mean? Here, I insist. Not a word, if you don't wish to hurt and offend me."

In vain Mr. Tops tried to resist. The fact is, he couldn't express himself; and he went down fairly blubbering with sixteen pounds ten shillings in his rough hand, and left his master crying up-stairs.

"I shall have to look arter him afore long," quoth Tops to the Downy, "or I'm blamed, if I wouldn't throw this 'ere money into the misken, or giv' it to a horfan in the street."

Just then, Aubrey, as men in deep grief will often think over minute trifles, remembered the history of those very chairs for which Cakeman had made that interesting charge. He had given them to the steward himself after the wreck, on his representation that they were not worth removing from the shop, where he had sent them, in common with the remainder of the salvage from the wreck, to be repaired. We are in a position to state that they looked uncommonly well in the coffee-room of the new hotel.

"What a fool I am!" cried Aubrey, "to be duped thus to the last." At this moment another visitor was announced, this time a lady deeply veiled. "Tell her I can see no one—no one!" thundered Aubrey. "Tell her to write, if she has anything to say."

Tops touched his forelock and retired. Presently he came up again with a note.

"The lady says, sir, that if you read this you will be sure to see her," he said, handing a note to Aubrey. "She looks like one of them women as is took pious, and goes about collecting money to build churches for the poor," he added, *sotto voce*. It's a sort I

shouldn't let in anywheres, if I'd a choice in the matter. As for this one, she looks like own sister to a stick of black sealing-wax, she's so straight and thin. There ain't no bend in her whatever. That rum cove below he peeps out and says, 'Blest if she ain't a walking hadvertisement for Jay's Mourning Wareus.'"

During this soliloquy of Tops, Aubrey opened and read the letter. It was couched in the following terms :

"I am come to ask you to redeem a promise made to me at Richmond by the water-side. Do not refuse to see me now. I come as a suppliant, and I rely on your word. You told me you would assist me then, and I am now in the deepest need of it.

"Yours,

"K. D."

"See her—now? What is the meaning of this? The very thought of her is hateful to me. She is a remorse rising from the river—a dark recollection from the grave!" He breathed heavily and clutched the table for support. "What does she want? Who has set her on? Is she impelled by some devilish curiosity? Or has she come to reproach me with my folly—with being too late? Let me think—let me remember. She never encouraged my insane folly—she spoke truth to me. I will see her. I will not play the coward. There is no punishment too great for me. Here, tell her I will see her. Show her up at once."

Tops immediately went on his errand; not without a certain look of apprehension which might be explained by his informing the Downy directly after, that his master had certainly gone out of his senses.

“Tain’t onlikely,” observed that worthy in answer to that remark, “considerin’ wot I’ve knowed ’appen to a cove in distress. To be sure he was honly a homlibus driver. Remind me as I tells yer hof it over a pipe and a drop of summut warm this werry night.”

CHAPTER XX.

ALL HE COULD DO.

O Poverty, by thee the soul is wrapp'd
 With hate, with envy, dolefulness, and doubt :
 Even so be thou cast out,
 And even so he that speaks thee otherwise ;
 I name thee now, because my mood is apt
 To curse thee, bride of every lost estate,
 Through whom are desolate
 On earth all honourable things and wise ;
 Within thy power, each blest condition dies :
 By thee, men's minds with sore mistrust are made
 Fantastic and afraid :—
 Thou, hated worse than Death, by just accord,
 And with the loathing of all hearts abhorred.
 Guido Cavalcanti. Translated by G. D. Rossetti.

ACCORDINGLY, the interview between Aubrey and his lady visitor, who, we need hardly say, was Kate Dareall, took place.

“ I am sorry,” she said, on entering the room, “ to intrude upon your privacy, to come here at all, to enter a house doubly sacred in my eyes ; but I have no choice. You once promised me your assistance. I have need of it—very sudden need now. I want a certain sum of money immediately ; will you give it to me ?”

Aubrey started, and remained for a moment silent. It was evident that she did not know all. Should he tell her? Nay, perhaps he had no choice. What amount would she require? Probably a sum beyond his means to give.

"Sit down, pray sit down, Miss Dareall," he replied. "I am not very rich just at present, you know. What is the amount which you need?"

"Five hundred pounds!" she replied, in a calm, clear voice; and, as we might say, with the utmost coolness.

The old spirit of generosity came strongly upon Arthur, mingled with a certain feeling of desperation. There was also some little surprise, not to say a stronger emotion, elicited by this appeal. But he did not stay to analyse his feelings. Five hundred pounds! It was nearly every penny he had at his command in the world. He was about to be thrown upon his own resources. No matter; he would take a place under Government—the librarianship of the House of Commons, or something of that kind, suited to his taste. He had warm friends in the Government and Opposition also. Or he would fall back on literature and the drama. He had talked to Blanche some months before, about their being poor together, and she had seemed rather to approve of it in her beautiful enthusiasm. But then she was gone—gone, and how? Well, he could die too. He did not care how soon. What right had he to live? At any rate, utter poverty was some expiation. All these thoughts rushed through his disordered head; for, in truth, he was overwrought, and acting like a

man in a dream, ever since the disappearance of Blanche. Had he not starved himself, and abstained from all exciting beverages, he would, in all probability, have committed suicide.

Aubrey took out his pocket-book and counted five notes. They were for one hundred pounds each. He placed them in an envelope, which he closed, and then presented to Miss Dareall. She looked at him with a strange expression, which often struck him after. It was one of mingled pity, interest, and admiration. She spoke partly to herself and partly to him—

“This merits forgiveness. Thank you, Mr. Aubrey. Something tells me that you will not repent this hereafter. It is, believe me, for a sacred object, this money. It is not for me—for my use. Do you know I would rather beg in the streets—no, I mean,” she said with a shudder, “rather die, than have asked you such a thing for myself. Poor fellow! you look very ill. Do take care of yourself. There may be some happiness in store for you yet. Your wife!——”

Aubrey started, and waved his hand impatiently.

She continued, “I was going to say, Mr. Aubrey, that she may yet be restored to you. Who knows? You have no evidence of her death. Nay, listen!”

“This is cruel!” cried Aubrey. “I must implore you to spare me this. Excuse me. Leave me to myself. I am happy to have rendered you a trifling service. I quite understand that it is some charitable object you have in hand. Good-bye, Miss Dareall!”

"We shall never meet again." And he opened the door, and bowed low to the actress. She paused irresolute and confused. Her allegiance to Blanche was shaken. Might she not spare them both a life of misery and despair? She stood in the doorway.

"If, Mr. Aubrey, I should place in you a great, great confidence, and ask you——" Here she hesitated.

Aubrey entirely misunderstood her meaning, and spoke coldly and haughtily. "It would be utterly in vain. I have done all that I possibly can. I have kept my word to the full. It is not in my power to do more—— I assure you; not in my power."

Miss Dareall's face flushed with an angry glow of shame. With a strong effort she repressed the inclination to return the money he had given her, at a cost she was far from suspecting. She looked at the expression of his face. His brow was knitted, and his lips pale and compressed.

Nothing, save the knowledge of the use she intended to make of that money, prevented her from flinging it on the floor. She could not explain her need, and she fancied that she was utterly misunderstood. As for Aubrey, poor fellow, in reality no mean and ungenerous thought entered his head. He only thought of the reality of his position, and acted as if she knew it nearly as well as himself. Whereas, it never occurred to her that he was not at least still master of thousands. Then the full appreciation of the wounded feeling and stern determination of Blanche recurred to her mind. She walked up to

Aubrey, and placed her small ungloved hand in his. He shuddered at the contact. The action and the touch reminded him of Blanche. So he did not return the warm pressure of her fingers.

"Good-bye, Mr. Aubrey," she said; "I will not thank you again. I don't mean to ask you for more money, I assure you. This is ample for my purpose. I don't mean ever to encroach on you any more. I know you are not so rich as you were. At least, I have heard so. You have behaved most generously, and you will not repent it. It is for a sacred purpose, I assure you."

Aubrey muttered something in return, and mechanically accompanied her to the street-door. In giving the money so needed by himself, he had obeyed rather a habit, an old instinct of his nature, when he was still comparatively rich. His act resembled Timon's profuseness at his penultimate banquet, before he sent out to borrow a little cash from his toadies and parasites. He had not realised his position. What man knows poverty, till he tries it? He may see it daily and all its evil effects, its curses, sorrows, contumely, and squalor. He may inquire into it, fill a Blue Book with the result of his researches, pen a beautiful essay upon it, dramatise it, or write a novel upon it, but he must feel it, before he can know it. The imagination may easily picture the delights of wealth; but utterly fails to sound the infinite depths of want. No man knows the world thoroughly, who has not been poor. A doctor might as well say that he knew the pains of childbirth, or a sound and healthy lithotomist that he was perfectly acquainted

with the agony of the disease called the stone, as an essayist or philosopher profess to be acquainted with the personal humiliations, miseries, and deprivations of poverty. We see a beggar in the street, and if we have ever known what it is to be cold and hungry, we can form some idea of what he suffers in that respect; but if he has seen better days, can we realise the fierce crowd of resentments gnawing his heart like rats, his mistrust of Providence, his hatred of his fellow-men; as he obeys the stern edict of "move on;" as he experiences the dreadful condemnation of "hit him hard, he has no friends;" as he crawls forth a moral leper in the great and busy world, without even a friend in the same condition as himself? For there is no fellowship for the broken-down man. Thieves have their consorts, cadgers their associates, impostors their mates; but the human being struck off the roll of prosperity is alone; i.e., unless his misery is enhanced, and his affliction multiplied and intensified by the haggard looks of a family sinking in the cold and remorseless waters around. We say, that he who has not personally felt the abandonment and condemnation, the kicks and cuffs, and oaths and sneers of the world, knows absolutely nothing of the pangs of want. If Shakespeare himself knew them, there must have been a period when he was penniless and in despair.

The great and absorbing sorrow of Arthur Aubrey as yet kept him from the thought or appreciation of minor cares. Nor had the time come for him to know poverty, to read the wrinkled anguish of her face in the reflection of his own countenance mir-

rored in passing some gilder's shop. When, therefore, the street-door had shut upon the philanthropical Miss Dareall, and he exclaimed—somewhat theatrically, it will be said—“Now, Blanche, thou are avenged! Now, Ruin! I look thee in the face, without the means to fly from shame, degradation, torture. I have nought save myself to rely on—these shattered energies and neglected talents to begin life anew, and to support existence”—it meant in reality very little, i.e., he meant a great deal; but was not in a position to realise and appreciate what he said. He thought that he was entering upon a stern campaign, that he was vowed to labour and high resolve, that he was henceforth doomed to work honourably, and it might be struggle hard for a maintenance. But he did not at all contemplate the ragged necessity, the forlorn despair, the squalid break-down, the seedy pauperism which might be his doom. The Nemesis he invoked upon his own head was not even thread-bare—much less arrayed from a rag-shop; wearing the likeness of the blear-eyed hag known to the pawnbroker, who snatches the unfinished shirt and the flat-iron from the trembling hands of impoverished toil—his was a genteel Nemesis, holding an official position, writing successful dramas in an interesting way, penning stories for magazines, and publishing the poetry of grief at a guinea and a half a page—not the spectre of the dark arch, the beldam of the casual ward. If he had been able to pierce through the cold and misty veil of the future, and to recognise the features of the Nemesis who awaited him, it is not very probable that he would have accepted the

wager of battle with a new life, but rather have yielded the contest at once and ended a misspent existence by a guilty death. But we must not anticipate our tale. This much is certain. If a man could apportion his own punishment in this world, he would often pronounce a very impressive condemnation, ending with a sentence quite inadequate to the burden of his speech. His judicial performance would resemble that of the late celebrated Mr. Justice Maule, when addressing a poor man who had been found guilty of the crime of bigamy, under the old divorce laws. That gifted judge spoke something to the following effect :

“Prisoner at the bar ! you have been found guilty by a jury of your countrymen of a dire and grievous offence against morality, society, and the laws of the land. I am here to represent the majesty of the law, which you have violated. You may plead poverty, ignorance, provocation, temptation, and even necessity—I have nothing to do with that. You say that your first wife was drunken, and a thief ; that she pawned your property, neglected and beat your children, assaulted and disgraced you, made a hell of your home, and finally abandoned you for another man. All this the law does not consider in the slightest degree. You should have sought the remedies which the law provides. You should have brought an action for crim. con., which might have cost you a thousand pounds. You should then have had recourse to the Ecclesiastical Court, where you might have succeeded, probably, at the cost of another thousand pounds. Thence, you had the

option of appealing to the highest tribunal in the country, the House of Lords, in order to free you entirely from the meshes of the drunken, thievish, and adulterous shrew, whom you had the folly or misfortune to make your wife. This might have cost you some three thousand pounds more. Thus, for five thousand pounds you might have obtained a divorce by the legal means which the justice of England places at your disposal. True, you are a labouring man, and I understand your wages amount to an average of eighteen shillings a week, out of which you maintain in a clean and creditable manner, as you are bound to do, the issue of your first and legal marriage, as well as the offspring of the wicked and adulterous connexion which you have formed. Prisoner at the bar ! you have broken the laws of your country, and have been found guilty very properly of a heinous and atrocious offence, striking, as I may say, at the root of everything that is sacred in the social relations of Christian and civilised life. You have committed a crime, which, were it to become general, would rend every domestic relation and tie, and in so doing you have scorned to avail yourself of the opportunity of legal emancipation provided by the merciful consideration of the great lawgivers and makers of the land. I shall, therefore, sentence you with that due severity, and the exercise of that impartial justice, which I am here to interpret and uphold, and which the monstrous nature of your offence demands. The sentence of the Court is, that you be imprisoned for one day !”

Justly or unjustly, in the spirit of the learned judge, or in that of a blind and selfish condonation of guilt, we apprehend that were men to pronounce their own condemnation and sentence in this world, there would be a similar discrepancy between their language and their acts.

CHAPTER XXI.

DE OMNIBUS REBUS.

There are no "extenuating circumstances" in English "Law" and "Justice." There are, perhaps, too many in French. The English girl who spends five shillings of her paramour's money, the man with whom she has lived as wife, and who is given by the ruffian in charge, gets eight months' hard labour, is utterly disowned by her own prosperous kindred, though she has been cast upon the world in childhood, and is told by the "worthy" judge, that within his recollection she would have been hanged for such an offence. No folly of the heart, no offence of the passions, is lightly dealt with; but the cunning guilt of the brain finds friends and apologists everywhere. There is, at this moment, a subscription set afloat for a vendor of spurious curiosities, twice convicted of theft, to enable him to turn his "abilities" to a better account! A woman prosecutes her betrayer, the father of her five children, who is rich, and is told that her punishment is the fruit of her immoral connexion with him. We are only surprised that he was not accommodated with a seat on the bench. No one breathes a word of admonition to him.—*Modern Observations. By an old Law Student.*

IN the evening Tops and the "man in possession," who had become strict allies, had their promised pipe and glass of hot gin-and-water together in the now vacated pantry of the illustrious Binsby. Alas! Could that great man have known to what base uses that sanctum of crested silver and armorial lore would shortly come, he would have been more shocked in anticipation, than ever he was by the ruin to which his "parveynoo chief," as he called him, had come. "It's my hown fault," he would say, "for entering

into such a connexion. To be sure, I thought he was one of the Aubreys of Yorkshire—and his father was honly a merchant in the City!" To do him justice, he never said a word against Blanche. But then in all the noble families of his acquaintance, there had been "hinstances of females ennobled by marridge," as he said. On this very evening, Mr. Binsby called to inquire after something he had left behind; and his horror at beholding the Downy seated on a stool smoking a short clay in the place so lately sacred to Binsbian dignity and aspirations was commensurate with his magnificent proportions. That worthy "twigged him," to use his own expression, at a glance.

"Vell, hold Banting!" he said, "wot's your horders? The Collidge of Phisichuns has sent you hout for a constitooshinal precious late this evenink."

The sole answer vouchsafed was a look which fell far short of its intention. It was as if Jove had hurled some sheet lightning supplied in place of the real forked article by an official mistake of his War Department, at some uncommonly petty offender. There sat the Downy still grinning, and perfectly unabashed.

"I was not aweer," said Mr. Binsby, "that the streets was turned inside of this hestabishment."

"I shouldn't think it was much as you did know," answered the Downy. "There ain't room for it. You're stuffed too full of himportance, hold feller!"

"I shall be obleeged to you, whoever you are, to keep your remarks, until they are called for," retorted Binsby.

"Didn't yer call?" asked the Downy. "Then perhaps it was a homlibus as I heerd a rumblin'. Come, don't bust till yer wanted, vich is wot the horphan drummer-boy said to the unhexploded shell, ven he poured a bottle of fish sarce into it."

Mr. Binsby proceeded to tie up a small bundle of the property which he had left behind him, consisting of a clothes-brush, a shilling "Peerage," a cotton night-cap, and a few other similar articles, in a large yellow silk "handkercher," as he himself would have called it.

"'Ave a winkle?" said the Downy. "Do, hold chap, and make yerself at home. Yer don't 'appen to 'ave a largish-sized pin among them miscyllanious hoddys and hendys of yourn, do you?"

And he rolled a specimen of that plebeian "fruit of the sea" along the pantry dresser to the great man, who allowed it to drop on the floor, and then kicked it slowly back towards the Downy.

"That's wot yer calls perliteness, I suppose," continued his remorseless tormentor. "Your parients never paid nothink to teach you manners. I'll jest tell yer wot it is. I've a great mind not to let you take them things hout of this house, just to teach yer to be civil."

And the Downy suiting the action to the word, actually walked up to Mr. Binsby, snatched the parcel from his fubsy hands, and threw it on the floor by the rejected winkle. What might have occurred we are unable to state; but fortunately at that moment Tops entered the pantry, and made peace between the representatives of outward and inward vulgarity,

which he achieved with considerable adroitness. Yet for a butler, Mr. Binsby was in reality much more of a gentleman than many a person with a banker's account, who would make but a dishonest and disreputable butler. Look at that bloated and pompous pest "Major" Bragman, whose chief triumph in life was to break up a West-end club to which he unfortunately belonged, and who endeavoured to perform a similar service to a Volunteer corps, in which he got a commission by carefully disguising his real temper and antecedents. Some years ago he was a noted black-leg and card-sharper, and after a "prosperous" career of swindling at home and abroad, reappeared in "Society," where, by the most patient toadyism, he got a sort of footing, and talked about his friend Lord Fitzfoodle, and "my bankers the Robinsons," to every one whom he met. What odious vulgarity of this kind will not Society endure, when it "smells" of real or assumed property! Besides, few like to meddle with malignity and unscrupulousness, and so every one goes on wondering why some one else does not "kick the fellow out of the club, sir, by Jove." Yes, there are plenty of Major Bragmans about, better tolerated than men of true courage and far higher pretensions, who are not gifted with the attributes of the skunk and the jackal, the cowardly hyena, and the venomous snake.

"Now then," said Tops, after Mr. Binsby had departed on friendly terms, actually smiling a lofty smile, when the Downy asked him for a song, and listening with apparent complacency to the admonitions bestowed on him to be sure and button up his

coat and take care of his precious health for the sake of his fellow-creatures and an admiring public—"now then, let's have one of them stories of yourn as yer was a telling me of, when that lady in a veil called to see master."

The Downy seemed awhile plunged in deep reflection.

"Does that chap ever go in the water? I mean, does he hever take a bath?"

"Well, I can't say exactly," replied Tops; "I fancy he do sometimes. Whatever do you want to know that for?"

"Vy," replied the Downy, very gravely, as if the subject demanded it, "if he do, there might be a wacancy when the hipperpotamouse can't come to time. It's my hopinion a hungrateful country don't know that man's desserts. He oughter 'ave nothink wotever to do but to 'elp the Speaker of the 'Ouse of Commins to port wine. That's my noshun of his nateral horfice, and the werry next time there's a Cabynit Council, I means to speak about it, that's hall."

"Well," said Tops, "for my part, I don't see why he shouldn't be Speaker hisself, and pour out his own port wine. I dessay there's been a many not so good-looking; and a many as couldn't do the dooties half so well. But I want to hear this story, as soon as I've lit this pipe."

"Vell," said the Downy, "I knowed a man vunce as drove a bus for fifteen year, as cum hinto a matter of four hundred pound, as he'd bin hexpectin' of all that time, through the death of a hannuitant,

as might have been backed heavy to die the werry fust year as the money was left in rewersion, as the lawyers said. Vell, she went on a living out of sheer spite, and he went on a driving like a monymment of patience in a drab coat on the box, till she was so weak, you'd have thought she hadn't strength left in her to go through the sairymony of dying. Vell, that man was werry reg'lar in his habits, and he said werry little to any one; and all he did was to put a bit of crape on his whip, the day of the funeral, and he give notice to his employers to leave in a month. The last Saturday night of the month he finished up as usual, and made a present of his capes to a waterman as was a pertickler friend, and give his rug to another coachman on the road, and treated hall on the line he travelled, as could come, to a supper and drink, and went home, and found his wife had bolted with a Bobby, and gone clean off to Amerikey, with hall the money, and sold the furniture besides. No vun see him on the Sunday; but on the Monday he come back and asked to be put on the road again; but the properiators said they wos werry sorry his place was filled hup. It was a pouring wet day, and old George Adams, as used to drive the Liverpool mail, asked him to take a drop of something warm, for his teeth were a chattering in his head. 'Bill,' says the conductor of his own bus, who come in for threepennorth, 'whatever 'ave yon done with your hair? You've been a powdering it, sure-ly?' 'No,' says he, 'I han't; but,' he says, whispering quite loud, 'I've been a dying of it these fifteen year, that's what I 'ave, and last Saturday night the dye

come off.' George winked at the conductor, and the conductor looked werry grave at him. 'It's my opinion,' says he, 'that he's haff his 'ead. It's hall along of that money;' for they didn't know what 'ad happened to him then. Vell, they left him there, and he went out talking about the world coming to a hend, as if he'd been a hearing the Reverend Spurgin, the celibrated preacher as keeps a private shofel, which is werry likely wot he'd been a doing of on the Sunday, you see. And haff his 'ead he were; for he mistook the canal for the wet road on his way someveres that night in a hopposite direction from home, and a coroner's jury brought in a werdict of haccidental 'omicide through grief at his wife's misconduct."

"There's a sight of rum things even in the bus line," resumed the Downy after a brief pause. "I knowed a coachman as druv a bus to Norwood, as was fell in love with by a real tip-top lady, and ven he'd knowed her some time, she broke an happintment, and he never clapped heyes on her for seventeen year. He was a werry fine stout man, and grew quite melincolly, and ven the passingers thought he was lookin' for fares, he was a lookin' for vun sure enough. Vell, he pulls hup vun day at the 'Pig and Tinderbox,' and there she was, and a nice-lookin' youth standin' by her side. He throws the reins down in a jiffy, and haff he gets. 'You've been a long time keepin' that happintment, ma'am,' says he, werry respectful. 'Yes, I 'ave, coachman,' says she. With that she invited him in werry perlitely, and hordered a bottle of port wine, and sends the youth

hout to smoke a Cuba, and look at the bill of the play. ‘Coachman,’ says she, ‘I’ve a secret to tell you.’ ‘Thank ye, ma’am,’ says he. ‘You’ve been a long time a thinkin’ on it.’ ‘That boy is your son,’ says she, takin’ no notice of his hobservation, no more than if he hadn’t made it. He was a werry strong man; but, as he said arterwards, ‘he was never nearer faintin’ in his life.’ Vell, she told him that the young gent was heir to a large fortin’, and she made him a ’andsome present, and promised to meet him next week; but he never set eyes on her agen; and he grew more stout and melincolly every day, and took to drink, ven he’d tell this ’ere story of hisn to any vun as vould listen to him; and venever he see a perticlarly fine-drest middle-aged female, he’d drive on quite sudden, vether a pas-singer was gettin’ in or hout, it didn’t matter to him. Till vun day he got more hexcited than usual, and fell hoff the box in a fit of appleplexxy, just vere he fust met that party as ’ad been his ruin like hentirely.”

This is but humble romance in real life. For romance in all its phases, but without poetical utterance, was there ever anything like the tangled skein of the nineteenth century, wherein lords become beggars, and even Sir Bernard Burke loses their identification and history in the backwood, the sheep-walk, the kennel, and the slum; wherein “shoddy” and “villany” rise to sudden pre-eminence among men; wherein the great mob of a great city opens and closes upon the living, as the waves close over the dead; wherein no commercial house or bank is

safe, and there is scarcely a character above suspicion ; wherein there is opportunity for every woman to deceive her lover or her husband ; every rogue to succeed in life, if he be only rogue enough and fortune smile—an age of heroism among the small, and littleness among the great ; an age so mixed, confused, so alloyed with every metal, that it is neither gold nor iron, brass, nickel, nor even tin ; an age which falsehood and hypocrisy have marked for their own to such an extent, that the multitude follow a false cry and worship a false idol, knowing them to be false, and despising in their inmost souls that which they openly profess to reverence and adore ? “ But have we not the Press ? ” cries one. “ Is it not,” may be answered, “ the safety-valve of indignation, rather than the guardian of public morality ? ” In these days we satisfy ourselves with calling names. We suffer a minister to be accused of ignominy and treason, and then pronounce him a necessity to the State, as if the nation could not possibly survive him when he is dead. The lawyers thrust their tongues in their cheeks, whilst they tell anecdotes affecting the probity of a judge, yet he continues to dispense justice or injustice over the land. Some of our generals and admirals wear decorations as a reward of their diplomatic discretion, rather than their valorous deeds ; and journalism is not silent thereon, and thereby only enhances the disgrace. We have seen the whole force of public opinion brought to bear against a nobleman or a contractor in vain. There are cases when the gold armour-plates are sufficient to resist the heaviest cannonade,

and when the smoke dies away the vessel floats uninjured, with the signal of piety at the fore.

In the midst of all, a spasmodic jubilee hails the completion of a telegraphic cable, as if the instantaneous transmission of a lie were worth the slowest truth that ever sailed in a three-decker from land to land. After all, is it a better or a worse age than any that has gone before? It would be difficult to answer. Probably the world, represented by its leading nations—those that make and leave the history of the period—is good, bad, or indifferent, by turns. We are not so depraved now as the Romans under the Empire! Instead of torturing thousands of human beings and animals in an Amphitheatre, we starve thousands of men, women, and children, or allow them to starve in our streets and fields, ditches and byways, and we keep our wild beasts on excellent fare in our Zoological Gardens. There is a refuge for homeless dogs, where no labour is exacted in return, and no questions asked; and enlightened humanity, in the most popular of our newspapers, writing up to the demand and spirit of the period, weeps tears of ink over the sufferings of a rat, worried by a terrier, and invokes legislation to put an end to such cruel sport. Yet the omnibus driver works fifteen or even sixteen hours out of the twenty-four, unpitied, to die of acute rheumatism, or end his uncomfortable days in the workhouse. The bones of the English child are literally ground to supply the luxuries of the rich. There is no pity for poverty, no mercy on want-compelled crime. Look at the ostentatious livery of charity worn by those

yellow-legged, bare-headed schoolboys. The close-cropped little fellows wear neither caps nor hats; because they are poor, the children of poverty, and ought to be humble.

They are in a chronic state of reverence for the magnificent bounty of their superiors, and suffer ear-ache and consequent deafness in after life. Sometimes it hardens, and sometimes it kills. We believe that the ugliness of the dress prescribed by a noble Charity, actually influences the physical looks of the wearers, and makes the poor youths ugly, awkward, and angular. Lately, one of these lads got as far as Paris by means of a cheap excursion, and was taken for a Japanese. We saw a couple of hundred this afternoon on their way to return thanks somewhere for the blessings heaped upon them. Poor lads, they could not uncover their heads on entering the church! All the thanksgiving must have been taken out of them long before. We can fancy what hard unforgiving wretches those of them who grow up and succeed in life must become. We know the case of a girl brought up at an orphan school, where, she said, the sickly ones died and were buried. That is the least expensive way of providing for orphans, next to a Chinese baby tower. This girl was of a strong and robust constitution, and so escaped the cheaper alternative; but she did not look healthy, when she came out. Her body was like a huge corn, or chilblain; her soul was a cowering wild-beast driven in by the spiritual hunters to gnash its teeth in darkness among thorns. When she came out of the asylum, she was a liar and

a thief, a sceptic as to all good, and somewhat of an actuary in contemplated evil. She would calculate to a nicety all the chances of being found out. This creature by chance went to live with an eccentric couple who believed in the Supreme Being, but who were not formalists in their mode of worship. They were kind to her ; and at first she was puzzled, then dubious, then astonished, and finally a sensation stole into her heart. From that time, she became humanised. She ceased to torture flies, and pinch the baby. She found herself abstaining from drinking the beer, on her way from the public-house. She no longer cut tid-bits from the meat and stole the gravy, and defiled the dishes out of spite. She ceased to make faces on the stairs before she came in, and told something very like the truth one evening when she stayed out late. This went on, until one day on being reproved, she cried. Upon this her master said to her mistress, "My dear, I have hopes of that girl."

One day her mistress encouraged a little confidence, and the girl said,

"If you please, mum, I've tried very hard to be good, and I think I am beginning to like it a little. I was very wicked, when I came here. It was all along of the asylum. All the good girls died there, and I wanted to live ; and you see, mum, I was always very strong. They never spoke a kind word, and the prayers seemed so long and harsh. I hated everybody when I came out, and even my health and spirits was beginning to give in. I used to think

how wicked I should like to be, when I was put out to service. It was all along of too much Christian teaching, and no Christian kindness. 'If this is goodness,' I used to say to the biggest girls, 'let's be wicked,' and so we were. There was hardly a girl that came out of that school but has turned out bad, and so should I, if I hadn't come here."

All this is characteristic and true. We put the livery of servitude and degradation on orphan boys; and what person gifted with a generous nature ever looked at an orphan girls' school out for a walk, whom the sight did not depress and make sad? So small, and pale, and bony, and "humble," and *clean*. No making of mud pies there! No joyous laughter, no dirty pinafores, no tangled hair! Hair? It is all cut short. What should they do with that ornament of girlhood? They couldn't raise a laugh among the lot. They would eat plum-cake as if it were a duty, and carry an orange like a sampler, without even smelling at it. Is it possible that so many children can be ugly; that so many have large ears and coarse arms, when they are not lean and scraggy? And what is the consequence? When they grow up, the large majority become pilferers and dishonest servants; and the small minority, who are not frightful, in spite of everything, take to the streets.

The tender and the sensitive perish under the utilitarian grindstone; their souls will not fit into the dry, little arithmetical posture-frames assigned to them. They cease to be numbers, and become, let

us hope, angels with names. They die, one by one, and do not walk two and two in Heaven!

How the survivors must hate somehow and somewhere, in the deepest recesses of their little twilight understandings, their pastors, and masters, and mistresses, and the clergy, and the Bible, and the Prayer Book. For these books are made especially terrible to them—the one means punishment, and the other restraint. Yet the Divine Teacher of Teachers said, “Suffer little children to come unto me!” Alas! he meant children, and not little old men and women, whose separate identities are lost in the uniformity of barren rule, who all awake together at six, and step out of bed like automata, and have the same square inch of appetite, the same gill measure of thirst; the breathing mannikins of a toy Noah’s Ark; a very serious toy, not exactly meant for play, but grimmest earnest.

We once knew a brute in human shape, who took a kitten and cut off its ears and tail, and put a collar on it, and gave it gin in its milk, and called it by a comical name. When the human brute was in his cups, he would sit and laugh at the quaint antics of this perverted creature. No one even laughs at charity children. The very comicality of their dress is serious enough in the accustomed British eye. A foreigner might laugh at the yellow legs of a Blue-coat boy, or the Quaker-like appearance of female children taught that the very air which they breathe is composed of charitable oxygen, and who never had a doll among them in their existences; but his

laugh soon subsides into a smile of derision or pity—according to the heart of the man.

“A magnificent charitable institution, sir,” cries John Bull, who has just eaten the dinner of an ogre, over which the shortest possible grace has been said.

After all, consider the street children, the infant population of the alley and back slum, the “caten-wheeling” Arab, the orphan with both parents alive, the offspring of incest, who “never had no mother,” because he is the child of “aunt.” Is not “order” an improvement on this? We can hardly pronounce. It is the choice between the surviving hypocrite and the surviving ruffian, between Jacob and Esau, between the man who lives to adulterate food and swindle with legal precautions, and the predatory vagabond, who probably would not rob, if he could manage to live comfortably without it. Again, if one thing is wrong, it does not always necessarily make another right.

The thief in the dock may deserve his sentence—say two years’ imprisonment—but the Counsel who prosecuted him may merit ten, the Attorney who prepared the brief fifteen, and the Judge penal servitude for life. There might be a case, easily imagined, where such an apportionment would be in strict accordance with true justice.

CHAPTER XXII.

FACILIS DESCENSUS.

A lass coom wooing to my undoing
 (The red cow kicks the pail);
 Thee may'st churn till the morrow wi' pain and wi' sorrow—
 Waarm thoonder it turns strong yale.
 Get out, Madame Ruin, there's mischief a brewin'—
 "I'm Miss Fortune, sir," she zaid:
 "Then I wish thee'd marry, nor here longer tarry,
 And I'll tak Goody Luck in thy stead."

Country Song.

If all the sumptuous dinners given by a former favourite of prosperity, now out of luck and out at elbows, could furnish him with one cheap dinner in the Strand—if the recollection of all the turtle and venison which he has bestowed on a numerous circle of admiring friends, could pay for a single tough chop without "a follow" in the dingiest of Fleet-street dens—if Gratitude for past benefits, in the form of a friendly Genius, could or would, lend five shillings or eighteenpence to a modern Timon, as he slinks wearily and hungrily through the streets, and thinks of the champagne which he has poured down the throats of extinct parasites, as in a former geological period, and of the solid luxuries which he has provided for those who are now no more to him than the chill Phantoms of the remembrance of the Past—then one might still find an infinitesimal set-off against the frantic excesses of boyish Amphitryonism, and even the lavish absurdities of a maturer but not wiser age. Alas! how easily is he, who has befriended others, but forgotten himself, kicked by remorseless Fate 'ΕΙΣ'ΑΦΑ'ΝΕΙΑΝ, "into the unseen." He who forgets "Number One" is apt to become a cipher in this world, and the abuse of the selfish hunts his shadow into gloom.—*From the Note-book of Solomon Trustall, Esq. LL.D., Chapter last.*

It is not our intention, at present, to trace the ruined fortunes of Arthur Aubrey for any long period. He disappeared at once from Society. Those

of his great friends who did not cut him, he himself cut, either from pride or the apprehension that they would take the initiative. One day he met the good-natured Lord Madeiraville, who would have got him a post had he been applied to, and who was about to shake him by the hand. But Aubrey had already, within two or three months, become shabby in his apparel; and he looked at the nobleman with the aspect of a scared wolf, and crossed the street. Shabbiness in the first degree, when a man begins with truth to think that he is not altogether well dressed, does not at all interfere with the aspirations of literature, and Aubrey had already become a literary man. Of this anon. We must first tell how he fared when he left Queen's-square. It suited Mr. Grinderby, for certain reasons of his own, that Aubrey should escape the Insolvent Court, and as he happened to owe very few small debts this was easily effected. The fact is, that Grinderby had summoned the few tradesmen who were Aubrey's personal creditors, and had represented to them the state of his affairs. Their claims did not amount to more than two thousand pounds.

"Our client," said Grinderby, impressively, "is a ruined man. He is no longer entitled to receive the rents of his estates. The mortgagee has foreclosed, and the whole property will be administered by Chancery. If the estate can be preserved without a sale, it will be done on behalf of the heirs of the entail. The whole income will be applied to the discharge of the debts, which are secured upon the estate, and the gradual extinction of the mort-

gage, which our client ought to have paid off out of the personalty on his father's demise." (This was not true, as counsel had stated a contrary opinion.) "There is not a farthing available out of the estate for him. Our own claim on him for costs will barely be satisfied out of the sale that is announced to take place. In this state of things I have consulted my partner, and we have come to the determination to do what may be termed a very Quixotic thing. We propose to be satisfied with only the part liquidation of our own claim, and to offer eighteenpence in the pound to the whole body of the creditors. My partner, Mr. Cousens, was, as you may some of you be aware, Mr. Aubrey's personal friend, and has insisted upon this liberal course. It is a gift of one hundred and fifty pounds from the pockets of the firm."

There was at first an angry murmur of surprise and disgust at the state of affairs, then a period of doubt, and finally approval of, and even applause at the generous conduct of the firm. It ended in a composition on the terms offered by Grinderby. There then remained a sum of fifteen hundred pounds, or thereabouts, due on bills which Aubrey had got discounted. These Grinderby refused to include, and informed the holders that they would get nothing by suing Aubrey. But ere long, when two or three writs had been issued and judgments obtained, Mr. Grinderby, with a vast show of generosity, purchased the bills at about one-sixth of the nominal value, and so held his late client in his power, to proceed to execution when he pleased.

It did not suit Mr. Grindberby to lock Aubrey up then, or to make him insolvent. Perhaps he did not wish that everything should become public; perhaps he did not wish the management of Aubrey's affairs by the firm to be ventilated too much. It was through a female first cousin of Arthur Aubrey that the bill was filed in Chancery, which dispossessed him of his life estate.

The late Mr. Aubrey, in order to acquire the fee-simple of a property adjoining his own, which belonged to his maternal aunt, and which brought her in about five hundred pounds a-year, granted her an annuity on his whole property of one thousand pounds a-year for her life as an equivalent for a deed of gift of the land, which he managed for her, and which she always intended to leave him by will. This he did some years before his own death, and at a time when it was not considered likely that the old lady would survive him—in fact, when her life was not worth a month's purchase, much less a year's. She lived, however, to a considerable age, and only died a few months before the disappearance of Blanche, and consequently of the events which we are now endeavouring to narrate. The old lady never spent more than four hundred pounds a-year in her life; and thus Arthur Aubrey owed a very heavy sum for the unpaid arrears of this annuity. Had the original disposition of the old lady's property remained undisturbed, Arthur would have owed these arrears to himself; but on inheriting his father's property, one of his cousins represented to him that, owing to her husband's speculations and extravagance,

she and her children had nothing to live on but the interest of that sum, and suggested to him what a boon it would be to her as well as an act of justice, if her name were substituted instead of his own, in the will of this aged lady, who would obey any dictate that came from him, her favourite and the darling of her bed-ridden old age. To this Arthur, in his usual Quixotic mood, at once assented, and a new will was at once prepared and signed by the old lady, who had only to be made to understand that it was his wish, to execute it without hesitation.

“No one can now say, at any rate,” said Arthur, “that my attentions to my dear auntie are actuated by mercenary views.”

But it turned out a bad arrangement for him. The old lady soon after fell into a state of complete imbecility, and lived on merely in a sort of vegetable existence. During her remaining life another old lady, a sister of hers, and also her husband, died and left her all their property, which would otherwise have come to Arthur, but was now irrevocably willed away from him at his own dictation, and, as it were, by his own act. About this he never expressed or felt any regret. But when the invalid at length ceased to exhibit any vital sign, and the poor shrunken atomy, which was all that remained of her small frame, had been lifted from her bed of feathers in her pretty little house to her bed of mould in the country churchyard, then the consequences of Arthur's act became very unpleasantly conspicuous in the following manner. The arrears of the annuity which he had not paid up, and which he ought to

have invested, amounted to a considerable sum. To tell the truth, he had never thought much about them, and when the matter did occur to him, he dismissed it with the reflection that he could always pay the interest at five per cent., which would no doubt suit his cousin just as well as if he paid the money down. The fact is, he had never realised his true position, and refused to look it in the face, until it forced itself upon him as a very disagreeable fact. His monstrous infatuation for Miss Dareall, his idle habits and companions, his libertine recklessness, and blind, unaccountable folly, had paralysed all proper thought and action. He had never known the value and importance of money—never reflected, never reckoned, never kept accounts, never asked himself, "Where will this end?" Such men pay a fearful penalty, when the evil day comes. They appear to reserve all their appreciation of the realities of life until it is too late to be of any avail.

When the old lady, Miss Clementina Aubrey, died, there was, as we said, a considerable arrear due to Mrs. Wilkinson, Aubrey's cousin, in respect of the arrears of the annuity of one thousand pounds a-year secured by a bond upon the property, which did not pass through Aubrey's hands. Whether Mrs. Wilkinson thought, and perhaps rightly, and with a sound exercise of discretion, that if Aubrey were not forced to pay the principal, the interest would not accrue very regularly, or whether, as she declared more than once with tears, she never thought of the possible consequences of the act which we are about to record, is what we shall not pretend to determine. It would

be only gallant not to doubt any lady's word, and only charitable to believe the affirmation of one who read prayers with such becoming unction every morning and evening to her assembled household, with the exception of Thomas, the coachman and gardener, the only person exempt from this tribute to salvation, because he smelt so of the stable, and his shoes were necessarily thick and dirty. It was a delightful thing to see the four maid-servants and a country boy in buttons, with immense worsted gloves, which he was ordered to keep in a drawer in the hall-table, listening to the instructive genealogies of the Hebrew race, and how one unpronounceable name begot another throughout a lengthy chapter, or how the said Hebrew people killed man, woman, and child in city after city of the tribes whom they successively attacked. This mild mother of a family would dwell with gushing fervour on the destruction of every breathing thing, in reading these catalogues of old-world horror. Some chapters thus read were edifying in a different way. But the prayers put up by this exemplary matron, and the earnestness of their delivery, afforded the strongest contrast to the inner thoughts, and feelings, and language of that model family. Surely this mere form of daily worship, this lip-service, which has no source in the heart, this modulated phraseology, which means so much less than nothing, is in reality but an insult to the Great Being who sees all, even the self-deception of the uncharitable soul. Poor Tummas! A pair of slippers and an occasional bottle of eau-de-cologne might have included thee in those blessings so touchingly in-

voked—might have made thee fit to hear how Israel smote all the souls in Hazor with the edge of the sword, and houghed the horses, and burnt all the chariots thereof!

Under these circumstances, we feel persuaded that Mrs. Wilkinson told the truth, when she affirmed in the most solemn manner that she had no idea, in assigning the bond debt owed to her by her cousin and benefactor for a consideration to the country solicitors, of whom we have before made mention, that it would not only endanger that cousin's life interest in the property, but actually cause his ruin. These solicitors in due time demanded the money. This led to a correspondence with Messrs. Grinderby and Cousens. They, of course, made a great fuss about the interests of their client, but declined to give any undertaking that the interest on the bond debt should be paid out of the rents of the life estate. They named every contingency which might arise, such as all the farms being untenanted at once, and the possible general depreciation of land, then greatly rising in value, and the amount of repairs that might be needed in one year. Then there was always the possibility of an act of forfeiture on the part of their client. Of course the country firm knew their own interests best. There might arise a question as to the validity of that bond debt if not affirmed by Chancery, it was true. Still, if the others would wait, it would save their client. After all this harpy-like coquetry and grim rapacious dalliance, during which the two representatives of the town and country firms perfectly understood each other's

real intentions, the bill was finally drawn, and Messrs. Grinderyby and Cousens appointed by general consent receivers for the Court, on the understanding that the country firm should have certain local pickings and emoluments.

Mrs. Wilkinson wrote a beautiful letter to her cousin, deploring her evil fate.

"I assure you," she said, "I would rather pay the money out of my own pocket, were it in my power, but unfortunately I cannot. You know how I am situated. William's expenses at college have quite crippled us of late, and John's commission money has to be paid next year, and I am sure I don't know how we shall manage; and clothing for the girls is so expensive, besides dear Selina's music and German lessons. I am sure, my dear Arthur, I would help you if I could. With your talents, you cannot fail to get some permanent employment. I should think you could get a consulship, if you were only to ask, and we would do anything in our power to help you then. But at present it is impossible. If I had only another thousand a-year, I would assist you with pleasure. But His will be done!" &c. &c. &c.

Arthur Aubrey saw no more of his kinswoman; and she occasionally shed tears to all her friends on account of her poor misguided cousin, with an equal lachrymal apportionment of feeling truly gratifying to witness, during a period of at least six months; after which she only sighed and turned up her eyes devotionally at the rare mention of his name.

And what became of Aubrey, as autumn came and passed away, and the leaves fell and vanished,

the days shortened in the dreary November of that year?

He did not stay long in Percy-street, where for six weeks he lay on a bed of sickness hovering between life and death, and nursed by the rough hands of the devoted Tops, from whom Susan had parted to take service, as she said, with a foreign lady going to Milan and Rome. All the savings of Tops were soon expended, diminished as they were by some unfortunate turf speculations, into which the poor fellow plunged headlong, in the vain desire that he might thereby set his old master on his legs. When Aubrey got better, he tried hard to get literary employment. But he was out of the "grooves," and couldn't succeed. In the days of his prosperity, he had contributed several unpaid communications to a morning journal, which had created some little sensation at the time. So he called on the editor, but was coldly and sternly informed that the staff was complete. Then he tried to get a play acted. It was full of originality and power. In vain did he seek to recover a copy which he enclosed to his old friend Methusalem Wigster, of the Royal Thespis Theatre.

One weary night he received a note with that manager's regrets to say that the piece was mislaid. By the time he had recopied it, the principal incidents had made their appearance at another theatre. He could scarcely believe his own eyes and ears, when, having strolled into the pit of one of the smaller theatres, where a new and original drama had been announced by an experienced playwright, he recognised all the chief points, and much of the dialogue

of his own play. A choking sense of indignation oppressed him, and he felt inclined to get up and denounce the theft to the audience aloud. But he was depressed by want of money, and accepted the utter helplessness of his situation, and went home determined to take some proper action the next day. He consulted a literary friend, an outsider, whose acquaintance he had made in the parlour of a public-house in the Strand. That worthy inquired into the circumstances, and said,

“I don’t see what you can do. You tell me that the dialogue is altered and the plot only partially used. The piece, you say, is not published at Lacy’s, and I suppose it will not be. You must, therefore, employ a shorthand writer, if you go to law, to take down the exact words, and you can then see how close the plagiarism is. But then, you tell me, you did not keep a perfect copy. It is of no use to write to the newspapers. If any of them, which is doubtful, inserted your letter, who would care for, or believe you? Why this very man, who has cribbed from your play, has stolen in some way or other every single piece which he has had represented. The first was a well-known operetta, written by a school friend of his own, who was then going into the Church, and which was sent to this clever and unscrupulous writer from the Continent to get it placed anonymously on the stage. This he stole holus-bolus. The real author could not well expose him, you see. Then there was poor Bob Brown’s famous drama, which came out at the Parnassus. He was another old school chum of Prigley’s, and I read every line of his piece, before

Dick Prigley got him into his clutches. Prigley persuaded him to let him touch it up, do a little stage business for it, you know, and it was to be brought out under his auspices. Somehow Brown, a nervous fellow, who drank very hard, but who was full of genius, was persuaded not to go near the theatre on the first night. I believe Prigley got some one to entice him away and make him drunk. At any rate, when the author was called for, Prigley bowed his sole acknowledgment from a private box. The next day Brown swore he would take his life; but somehow he didn't. The spurious authorship was partially contradicted in the newspapers, but all in vain. Brown got delirium tremens soon after, and then, Prigley managed to square the matter; for Brown was desperately hard up. Why, sir, the whole reputation of that man is built up on similar transactions. How he has escaped personal chastisement I don't know—perhaps he has not. Look at the career of Bustincraft Bouncer."

"Stop!" cried Arthur. "Bustincraft did at least write the 'Rogue's March of Intellect,' which you will allow is a standard play in the language."

"So, I admit, it is generally thought," was the reply, "and very few know the real history of that. But I am one of those few, and I will tell you. Yes, it is an admirable play; and I owned it puzzled me to know how he had done it, though I had my doubts. You remember old Judge Richardson, of the 'Hole in the Wall,' do you not?"

"Certainly," said Arthur; "but surely you don't mean to say that he was the author?"

“I might fix on a less likely man,” was the answer. “Richardson was a very clever fellow, full of wit and humour, ay, and possessed of a very good heart. He was one of the strange productions of these times.”

“I have heard,” rejoined Arthur, “many excellent traits of him; and yet he lived by pandering to obscenity and ribaldry, and prostituted his undoubted talents in a shameless way.”

“You mean he presided over the mock trials, which were once so popular an entertainment. Well, I don’t know that they were conducted in a manner much more reprehensible than our real Courts, and then they were minus all the injustice, real and false swearing, bullying, and Mammon-worship which characterise the latter. Well, sir, I have known the Judge perform some kind, and even noble actions. No man was at times more sensible of the misery of his career than he. But what would you have in these days? I tell you that some of our managers have done far more harm to the public morals than he? Look at the broughams at the stage-door of the ——; the ladies who are engaged at the ——; the performances at the ——, where the manager sails as near the wind as he dares; the dresses of the ballet at the ——, &c. &c. At any rate, poor old Richardson did not attempt to demoralise the minds of our wives, and sisters, and daughters. Mind, I don’t attempt to defend his *métier*; nor did he.”

“But about the authorship of the play?” inquired Arthur.

"Well," was the answer. "I met poor old Richardson in the Strand one day apparently in a great state of excitement. 'Holloa!' I said, 'what's the matter now?'"

"'Has Heaven no special thunderbolts?' he answered, in his usual exaggerated tone.

"'Come, come, old boy!' I replied, 'I think you ought to be the last to complain.'"

"'Stuff!' he said, 'whom have *we* robbed and plundered? Don't talk to me; I tell you I am in earnest. You know I am sometimes. I cannot bear to see such rascality flourish!'"

"I soon perceived that he was not jesting, and I asked him what had offended him so much.

"'You know Bustincraft Bouncer?' he said. 'Well, I was standing at the corner of Wellington-street, when a carriage-and-pair—yes, sir, pair—passed me and splashed me, as you see, from head to foot. Look at this mud, sir. Look at my shirt-front, sir—it's all dickey with it, and I had not donned it a half-hour. I looked up, as the vehicle of luxury passed, and whom do you think I saw in it? Bustincraft, sir—the wretch Bustincraft, that ghoul, that vampire, who lives on dead men's brains, ay, and the brains of the living, when he can suck them with impunity.'"

"'That's what you mean by calling him a vampire as well as a ghoul, I presume,' said I.

"'Precisely, young man,' was the answer. 'I thought of my poor friend Wimple, sir, dead and buried; and if a look could have killed that wretch

Bustincraft, he would have been taken out of his brougham as deaf to time as his victim——’

“ And the judge relieved his feelings by an oath of comic intensity.

“ ‘ But what has Bustincraft done to this Wimple ?’ I asked.

“ ‘ Listen,’ replied the judge. ‘ Wimple wrote two or three successful trifles for the stage. He then threw all he knew into the “ Rogue’s March,” and gave it to Bustincraft to read. He never was able to get it back again, and Bustincraft at length declared he had lost it in a cab. Poor Wimple had kept no copy, and was dreadfully cut up. “ I don’t believe he has lost it,” he said to me one day. “ Why did he not say so at first ?” Well, sir, Wimple lived too fast, and got into sad trouble in the Government office where he was employed. In fact, he made a mistake, bolted, and went over to Boulogne. The sum was so small, that if the foolish fellow had kept out of the way, he would not have been wanted. But he must needs come back to look after Bustincraft and the play, on which he counted much. He thought Bustincraft would be moved by his distress and need. The day after his interview, he was arrested and committed to Newgate. I don’t say that Bustincraft gave the information ; but I feel as certain of it, as I do that Judas Iscariot adapted “ Mysteries” for the Jewish stage. Well, sir, poor little Wimple took cold, and a rapid consumption set in. He was but a sickly fellow at best. He managed to see me, and begged me—knowing, as he was pleased to say, that I had a good heart, to see Bustincraft

and get the play for him, if possible. "I have tried to write it again," he said, "and can't. If I could only get a hundred pounds for it," he said, "I could be properly defended, and there are many extenuating circumstances in my case." He then told me that he had returned nearly all the money before the warrant was out for his apprehension. I saw Bustin-craft, but I need not tell you that my mission was vain. Little Wimple died in gaol before his trial came on, and before six months were over, Bustin-craft produced the piece as his own with triumphant success. Do you wonder now at my rage when I was splashed by such a transcendent villain, and that I should ask why the bolts of Heaven sleep?"

"I owned that I did not. Now, my young friend, this is the way in which dramatic success is too often attained in the present day. Give up your original authorship, if you want success on the stage, and take to French adaptation and English annexation—that's my advice."

"But, good Heavens!" cried Arthur, "you don't mean to say that this is the general state of things?"

"Pretty nearly," replied the other. "I know a case where a young fellow sent a play to a manager founded on a celebrated French drama, by no less than three French authors. They do that sort of thing in France, you know. Well, as usual, he couldn't get it returned. The manager himself brought it out fifteen years after, slightly transmogrified, and considerably spoilt by his own vulgarity and ignorance, as a perfectly new and original drama by himself. He was not aware of the French

authorship, you see. The Press, of course, laughed at his assertions when they found it out, as they soon did, and the piece was withdrawn from the London boards; but the honest man acted it frequently in the provinces, and is now starring with it in Australia, as I read in the 'Period' the other day."

"You astonish me," cried Arthur, with an accent of despair. "But, come, there are some original plays acted in the names of their *bonâ fide* authors!"

"Of course," said the other; "if Bulwer, or Dickens, or Disraeli chose to write a play, any of those well-known authors could insure its being placed on the stage. There are three or four men who cannot write fast enough, as it is. But look at the sort of stuff that goes down with the aid of the scene-painter! What I say is this, that the difficulties in the way of an outsider are almost insuperable. Are you a dramatic critic for a daily paper? No! If you were, you would have a chance. As it is, the more genius and originality you can boast, the less your chance of success, and the greater the probability that you will only furnish stuff and suggestions for some daring playwright to work up into a flagrant sensation piece. If your play is good, the odds are that it will be completely worked out, and if ever you should be enabled to produce it long hereafter, through some means wholly irrespective of your deserts, you will have to fight charges of plagiarism from your own piece. When your playwrights get hold of a good idea, they don't leave it in a hurry, I can tell you. When that new and original French drama, stolen from my friend's

adaptation was produced, the first criticism that appeared in the 'Thunderbolt' was to the effect that a well-known favourite English drama had suggested its situations. No wonder, since that English play of twenty years' standing was originally founded on the French piece of 1837, or thereabouts. I tell you the whole thing is rotten. It is a combination of dishonesty, petty talent of approbation, cliquism, and ignorance on the one side, and of bad taste and want of appreciation on the other. If a thing is outrageously bad, the critics condemn it privately and applaud it in whole columns of spasmodic eulogy in the journals for which they write. Sometimes a manager will thrust half a dozen manuscripts into the hands of an acknowledged manufacturer, and say, 'Write me a sensation piece for such and such actors, and scenery.' But, stop! You told me that your play touches earnestly and morally on the 'Social Evil,' one of the great newspaper topics of the day, a thing our wives and daughters talk of familiarly when they ask what 'Skittles' had on yesterday, and the latest colour of 'Anonyma's' hair. You say that it is written with a high moral purpose. It won't do, I tell you. No manager will touch it!"

"Surely," replied Arthur, "this is to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel."

"I see," observed the other, lighting a fresh pipe, "that you don't understand the peculiar modesty of the British public, nor the peculiar scruples of its caterers; and, faith, I don't think they understand it themselves. The thing to be most avoided is an

earnest delineation of manners as they exist; and, above all, you must never touch on dangerous topics with a high purpose and a moral. You may say and do what you please in a certain way; but be sure, above all, that your object is to demoralise and pollute the minds of the young, and pander to the wickedness of the old in an airy and facetious style. If you want to introduce the worst of harlots on the stage, be sure that she is at the same time a wife. Shock every sense in the promotion of vicious knowledge and ideas, but do not outrage a conventionality in the sacred cause of virtue, otherwise you will alarm your manager and horrify your public alike. Not that I think so much harm of the public," he said, musingly, "as I do of those who furnish the entertainment. It is astonishing what will go down if the scenery is good. I expect that by-and-by it will come to writing for the scene-painters, and I am not sure that the ingenuity of plots will lose by the change."

"It is a sad state of things," said Aubrey, with a sigh. "Why, I sent a five-act play only last week to the very man, Prigley, of whom you have given such an account. I knew him once. He used to visit at a house where—I—was quite at home."

"I hope you kept a copy of it," said the other. "If so, I advise you to get it cheaply printed, if you set store by it, and get it entered at Stationers' Hall; not that even such a step would be a complete protection, as he would swear he wrote it twenty years before; and, what is more, the majority of the public, who are fools and rogues, would believe him and not

you. It is astonishing what sympathy does in this world."

"But this is infamous!" cried Arthur.

"Still it is true," rejoined the other. "This is not the age of assassination in a physical sense; nor is the mail stopped on Blackheath—to be sure, there is none to stop. Villany is spread fine; very fine, now-a-days. We shall return home to night safer than our forefathers did from robbers and murderers. There is very little danger, if one gives a wide berth to the Police."

"You take a dark view of things," was all poor Arthur could get out.

"Why, sir," returned the other, "there are plenty of actions which men openly avow in private among friends, for which they ought to be hanged, sir, hanged. To recur to managers. Look at that enterprising specimen, Mo Twitterly; who is no better and no worse than the others. T'other night I was sitting at Timpson's taking my solitary glass of grog in the next box to him and two or three of his friends. Little rosy-gilled Firkin, about the only thoroughly manly, good-natured, straight-forward fellow among them all, who holds his place by sheer force of wit and intellect, and the drollery which makes him such a delightful companion, was urging Twitterly to produce a certain piece.

"'Come,' he said 'you have had it these three years; as I have told you, it is full of talent; it will suit your company to a T. You know *I* have no motive in recommending it, since, thank Heaven! I don't care a dump for any of you managers or your

theatres, which might be burnt down to-morrow for all I care. Come, come, Mo, give the poor devil a chance, as soon as that last filthy French adaptation, or abortion, you have brought over has failed, as everything you produce does now. I say, old fellow, how do you manage to keep your theatre open at all? I tell you this drama of poor Whitmore's is the best thing I have read these ten years. It will positively patch up the reputation of the Apollo to produce it; and besides, as I told you, the poor fellow who has written it is in a consumption and starving in a garret.'

"'I tell you I do mean to produce it,' growled the great man, testily.

"'Bravo!' cried little Firkin; 'that will be good news for Whitmore. I'll step over and tell him to-night.'

"'No, it won't. Stay where you are, and finish your claret,' chuckled Twitterly. 'I didn't tell you *when* I should do it. The fact is I am keeping it till he dies!'

"And so he is, sir. What he said in jest, he meant in earnest. When the time comes—that is, if he does not ruin himself by greedy speculation before Whitmore shuffles off this mortal coil—you'll see what an amount of benevolent capital he'll make out of the widow and four children, in connexion with the performance of this very piece. There never was a more gushing old humbug than he is sometimes. Why, he'll talk about the genius of 'our immortal Will, gentlemen,' at a theatrical dinner, till he cries. And the fellow, like the rest of his class, has not the

slightest appreciation of a poetical or a dramatical idea. He is positively ignorant, illiterate, and is just up to the interchange of the current common-places of stage slang and the stage requirements of the day. But education is not of so much consequence, if men in his position were possessed only of the instincts of art."

"May I ask," inquired Aubrey, "if you have ever written a play?"

"You want to know if I am a disappointed author," replied the other, smiling. "I can assure you that, on the contrary, I have had a wonderful success. I have written the pantomimes for the Apollo these five-and-twenty years. I am dramatic critic for the 'Weekly Regenerator' and—as, perhaps, you know—law reporter in the Insolvent Court; besides which I do an occasional article for a High Church Review, and have chronicled the fights for the 'Sporting Register' these fourteen years. But the last is worth next to nothing now. The Ring, sir, like the Stage and the Turf, is at its lowest ebb—on the borders of extinction, I may say. Had I consulted my own aspirations, I should not have gone into any of these things; but it was a case of bread, sir; bread for a large family. Besides, no one would be ass enough to attempt to write for a lasting reputation in the present day. Why, what were the Dark Ages compared with an age of universal mediocrity? I'll tell you what, the reputation of Shakespeare himself may not be able to stand against it. A lot of young fellows are discovering that he is a mistake, a traditional fluke. They speak with pity of him. The fact

is, they can make no more out of him for the purposes of burlesque; and they say that they wish he and his works could be buried by Act of Parliament for fifty years to come. They laugh at the idea of a ter-centenary, and vote him a bore. It is my opinion that Shakespeare will be extinguished by a legion of literary gents. How beautifully everything is rounded in this world! As you know, many, if not most of his plots and stories were founded on the doggerel ballads of previous times. If you go to the low music-halls, you will find them again reverting to something like that use. Macbeth is transformed into the Highlander of a tobacconist's shop, stabbing Duncan with an umbrella, or a pane of glass. Shylock becomes a denizen of the Minories or Houndsditch, with a daughter of low habits, who 'prigs' his tea-spoons to bestow them on an omnibus cad. Othello is, of course, a nigger minstrel, who commits a murder according to the popular perception and taste, and would expiate it at the Old Bailey, if the lady did not come to life, and dance 'Dusty Bob and Sal' with her lord. All the subtle imagination, the delicate thoughts, the finest creations of the Bard, are degraded into familiar filth and slang; the pillage of the Huns and Goths, the desecration of myriads of barbarians, the very profanation of swine let loose in the Temple of Apollo and the boudoir of the Muse, were as nothing to *this*."

And the speaker dashed down his pipe on the table and broke it; as if in corroboration of his judgment.

Arthur Aubrey shook hands with the cynic of the

“Blue Lion,” and went home to his miserable lodging a sadder and a wiser man. His route was nearly the same as that trodden some three years before by Lord Egbert and his companion, after the rencontre at the Escorial. The descent of Aubrey to absolute poverty was very rapid; so rapid that our description of it may appear scarcely natural to our readers. But it must be remembered that he was not like a fraudulent bankrupt—he had made no mysterious provision for his fall. He was stripped in a month, nay, in a week, of everything. He had taken away scarcely anything from the house. A portmanteau full of clothes, his gold watch and chain, a diamond ring, and one or two other less valuable trinkets, his studs and pencil-case, and a few trifles chiefly connected with his wife, were literally all that he had in the world. He had not feared poverty; because he did not know it—had not felt it. He was rapidly acquiring a lesson, which it is not well to learn late in life—which it is not pleasant ever to learn. He was still a member of the clubs to which he had belonged, and would be so until the end of the year. This was only of use to him, so far that letters still reached him at the Kemble. But oh! that dreary correspondence. He had a couple of pensioners on his bounty, when his income vanished, and these persons agonised him with their appeals, their importunities and reproaches. There was an old servant of the family and his wife, who had both carried him in their arms when a child. These gently reminded him once or twice that there was an arrear of some months due to them; for Arthur was never a very regular

paymaster. Poor souls! they did not know the catastrophe that had befallen him. And Aubrey manfully parted with his diamond ring, and sent them fifteen pounds out of the proceeds, which was half a year's allowance up to the Christmas of that year. Every day, and sometimes twice a day, there was a note from one of the other pensioners. This was a different sort of an affair, in which Aubrey had suffered his easy good-nature to be imposed upon by an artful and designing woman, who had professed a romantic attachment for him some years before, and who had worried, and bullied, and written him into a sort of compromise, by which he purchased immunity from her persecution by a small annuity. This wretched creature, who was maintained by three or four such contributors, and who alternated between hysterics and violent threats, when under the influence of gin, beset her contributors' clubs and chambers with female friends, and sometimes children bearing notes, who waited for an answer to applications for immediate aid. She was periodically very ill, and in a dying state. Imagine the notes which she poured in upon Arthur, to whom she always wrote, as if he had seduced her from the path of virtue, and cruelly abandoned her. Sometimes the postage of her notes was not paid. Then she wrote, "I have not a penny in the world to buy bread." At that time, her attention would, perhaps, be divided between her epistle and basting a goose. Her notes were always written in a detestably regular female hand. The superscription could not be mistaken for a moment, and they were so scented with

patchouli that Arthur could tell, before he opened the envelope in which the porter enclosed them to a post-office in Oxford-street, that there was one of those hated documents within. As long as he could, he sent something even to her. As if by some strange fatality, pressing and piteous applications for charity and aid poured in upon him in the first hours of his own distress. A dear old professor of German, whom he loved, and who had taught him to read Schiller and Goethe, wrote to tell him of a fire by which he had lost his all. A sick ballet-girl, whom he had known in the days of her prosperity and pride, sent him a heart-rending appeal. She was rheumatic and starving.

"You would not know me, were you to see me," she said; "but think of me in your kind and generous heart as I once was, and I know my appeal will not be in vain.

"P.S. My sister Phœbe is dead. She married a scoundrel who broke her heart, and I am all alone."

Aubrey remembered these two beings, not so very long ago, radiant with youth and beauty—creatures who ought to have been in reality that which they represented on the stage.

A bootmaker turned up, to whom Arthur owed about twenty pounds in his father's lifetime, and who had suddenly been forced to give up his business and disappear, having entered into heavy security for a friend. At the time, this man had written to say he would call upon Mr. Aubrey for the money; but, somehow, he never did, till the present time.

Now, if Mr. Aubrey would kindly leave him a

cheque for the amount, it would be his salvation. Of course he had no legal claim, as it was more than six years ago, but he knew that was all right enough, &c. &c.

All this was dreadfully galling to Aubrey. Why had not this man applied for his money, when he, Aubrey, was rich and could pay him? To be short, there was no end to these painful contretemps. Why does it happen so? Why does a rich man find it so difficult to meet with cases of touching and real distress. We verily believe that one of the firm of Rothschild, or Peabody, might go about London all the evening with his pockets stuffed with gold, in quest of deserving objects of charity and find none; whereas a ruined gentleman is constantly stumbling against families in affliction whom it lacerates his heart to be unable to relieve—a broken honest tradesman in the sick ward of a workhouse; a pallid girl working herself to death for a bedridden father, who has known better days; a starving family of orphans; a talented artist pledging his little scarce-finished “pot-boilers,” to procure a meal, whom it would be a luxury to assist, whom it is torture to be unable to aid. What is the reason of it? Is it the mere perversity of Fate? Does like draw to like? Certain it is that it is only the poor that know how the poor suffer, and who sympathise, if they cannot relieve.

It was wonderful how completely and suddenly Aubrey dropped out of the society in which he had moved. It was marvellous how soon he came down to poverty, which was anything but genteel; to wear

frayed linen and garments white at the seams, and greasy in cuffs, collars, and braiding ; to neglect his personal appearance ; to become acquainted with fried-fish suppers as a luxury, and sometimes to go supperless to bed. Before six months had passed, a "swell" on horseback asked him to ring a door-bell, and addressed him as "My good man !" He did not look up. If he had, he would have recognised a former flatterer and guest. He scowled and slunk on. The equestrian said to himself, "This comes of the incendiary, Bright. Some day we shall have barricades." It must be added that Aubrey carefully avoided the West-end.

"I cannot go through that street," said an extravagant Irishman one day. "The fact is, there is a poor fellow, a tradesman there, who owes me money, and I don't like to hurt his feelings."

We wonder whether Aubrey did not like to hurt the feelings of his old acquaintances. He might certainly have done so, had he spoken to any of them in Bond-street, or the Park. A gentleman out of luck looks far worse than even an unprosperous mechanic, or a tattered day labourer. As for Aubrey, who had been so smart and dashing, a thoroughly well-dressed young fellow in fact, he very shortly acquired an appearance something between that of a billiard-marker, at least a year out of place, and a German trombone-player, who had belonged to a minor theatre lately burnt down. The truth is, he did not know how to make the best of his slender means. When he attempted to cook a chop, he would cover himself with grease, which he did not understand

how to remove. His hat was never carefully brushed, like that of one who has served an apprenticeship to poverty. When the spring of the next year came, he would only prowl forth in the evening. When summer came, his hours became even later. He still remitted something occasionally to his noisy annuitant—the old servant had, happily for them both, been summoned to the still-room of death by a friendly notice of paralysis. With a feeling of mixed justice and pride, Aubrey gave the slip to Tops soon after Christmas, leaving him a letter at his old lodgings, over which the faithful fellow blubbered like a child.

This time the broken-drawn gentleman obtained a lodging in Meard's-court, Dean-street, Soho, at four shillings a-week, quite as much as his resources could provide. Here he began a life of penury in earnest. His slender stock of money had gone, long before his illness was over. He never knew what Tops did for him at that period, until that stud jewel of the human race had ceased to minister to him in the manner we have narrated. He took a base advantage of his master's ignorance of the price of commodities—such as fowls, and mutton-chops, bread and coals, groceries and potatoes—to cheat him in precisely an inverse manner to that which servants, from the Temple laundress to such personages as the great Cakeman, are in the habit of adopting when they do cheat. But Tops, to use his own phraseology, was “beat” at last. In vain had he added his own remaining slender stock of money to the sum lent by the pawnbroker on Arthur's gold repeater: the combined amount did not last long; for Tops would per-

sist in purveying well for his master. "He's used to it, and must have it," he would say. This was all very fine, could the watch have been pledged again, and could the money of Tops have been constantly added. All at once Arthur found him out, and put an end to the matter, as we have related. This time he paid a visit to the "uncle" himself, and left a ten-pound note in his farewell letter of thanks and blessings.

Tops searched everywhere for him, whilst a shilling of the money was left; and then took service as general out-door servant with lawyer Grinderby, a place which Susan had suggested to him on her departure.

Tops became wonderfully subdued ere long, in that situation.

"It's a lesson to vanity," he used to say. "Besides, it's my dear Susan's fancy that I should 'ave this innings in vice in a rellygious fammerly, while she's gone furren. Honly I never thought I should wear a second-hand uniform like this, with the tails of the great-coat actially reaching down to my heels. I'm to try and find out what I can about old Grinderby's games with the propperty. I honly wish I could find out something as would be of use to my poor guvernor as was; but it ain't very likely, unless this 'ere Grinderby was to leave his special hagreemint with *his* guvernor below, in one of the pockets of this mouldy old trap of hisn. I wonder the wheels don't take fire, that's what I do."

And Mr. Grinderby's coachman would dash a bucket of water over them with a violence which

seemed to express a conviction that nothing save the utmost energy on his part could avert such a catastrophe.

And how did Aubrey live? From a tragedy and a first-class novel, he had come down to try tales and padding for serials; he had sought literary employment of almost every kind, in vain. His efforts were indefatigable — their results contemptible. There were so many acknowledged padders at work. There were scores of educated, half-educated, and uneducated hacks, busy in the Museum, doing cheap articles out of forgotten books, or scribbling tales and stories filched from that prolific source, American journalism, which is decidedly inventive and original, chiefly in a fifth-rate sort of way. Now and then he would pick up a guinea or a guinea and a half from "Twice a Fortnight," or "All the Week Old." But such success was very rare indeed. His articles, to tell the truth, were generally far above the mark. He was quite capable of writing for "Blackwood," or any of the Quarterlies; only he could not get a hand in. He was an outsider, and an unlucky one. In literature, there are a few Tritons and many minnows. Every man of genius does not necessarily become a Triton. But when half a dozen names are told, the rest are not worth much. The demand is very great for inferior stuff. The fact is that the spread of information and education is in favour of the lowest class of authors. Our literature is becoming Americanised, without even the recommendation of American smartness. A commercial class of scribblers has sprung up. When you meet them in a body, you would fancy that

you were in company with bagmen, not scholars. Arthur Aubrey served no apprenticeship to this. He saw men, for whom, intellectually and socially, as scholars, gentlemen, and writers, he had the utmost contempt, making their four or five hundred a-year, and a little ephemeral fame of a certain kind. In practical cleverness and successful trickery, he was forced to confess they beat him hollow. No one would read his novel. He had not made, and could not make, a lucky hit. For a short time, he got on a weekly paper, and did the books for a pound a week. But one evening he wrote so clever an article on a novel by a popular authoress of the day, with whom the proprietor was on intimate terms, that he received his dismissal in no very courtly phrase. The lady's tale was more immoral than a story of Boccaccio, more vulgar in style than a retired West-end butcher's drawing-room furniture in his suburban mansion, or the pretensions of our old friend Mrs. Grimshaw and the Misses Grimshaw (two); whilst its best parts were the spoilt spoil of a manuscript left by a needy author with the newspaper proprietor to whom we have alluded, which was returned after a twelve-month to its owner imperfect, and without thanks or comment. But the book in question was spicy, sensational, and slangy, and had accordingly made its mark. How was Aubrey to know that the newspaper proprietor had married the sister of the authoress? Your true literary hack would have been better posted, than thus to cut his own throat. So Aubrey did not flourish.

One evening he met a musician, who had played at his own house, and who recognised him, and with

infinite kindness and good taste concealed the fact, and the pity which he felt. The pair fraternised, and the fiddler procured the *ci-devant* dilettante some permanent but humbly paid work. It was to copy scores for the theatre where the former was engaged. Here we shall leave him for awhile—a waif and stray in the mighty City, whose great roaring tide deafened his uncomplaining groans. One Saturday night, when he prowled forth to buy sustenance, that he might eat and not die—it was in Tottenham Court-road—he came upon one man whom he had known well, and who recognised him with a heartiness which approached the rude confines of glee. This was Mr. Stingray of all men!

“What! Aubrey?” he cried. “Why, we all thought you were dead. How very unkind of you to cut all your old friends. Where are you living now, eh? Sir Harry told me you were in America. Heard of you last at the ‘Blue Lion’. Literary, eh? Been out marketing for the Muses?” (looking at Aubrey’s ill-concealed purchases). “Shall be delighted to tell all our circle I found you so well employed. I say, dear old boy, where do you buy your bloaters? I never can get them good.”

“Mr. Stingray,” said Aubrey, “I don’t know what you mean by this; but I wrote to you a letter asking for some literary employment on your magazine about eight months ago, and you never condescended to answer it, and now I believe that you are merely prying into my misfortunes with excessively bad taste.”

“My dear fellow!” said Stingray, “friendship is

one thing, and the magazine which I have the honour to edit, another. I didn't suppose that fashionable insolvency—I mean, misfortune—is exactly the path to literary remuneration and fame; and judging by appearances, my opinion has been justified by the British public at large. But, upon my soul, if you'll accompany me to the nearest tavern, I'll stand the price of an article with pleasure, if you'll only tell me your history since I had the pleasure of meeting you last, and where you get such herrings as these."

The answer was a gesture and look so fierce and determined, that Mr. Stingray started back a couple of paces at least.

"You infernal scoundrel!" said Aubrey, as soon as he could speak. "Stand out of my way, or I'll strike you in the mouth. How dare you insult me thus?"

And he passed rapidly on.

"Hoity-toity! we are proud," said Stingray. "Here, policeman, look after that man. He is either a dangerous lunatic or a thief. What fun this will be for the club! Our exquisite friend down on his luck to such a degree, and as proud as ever. Confound his insolence! What a seedy brute he looked, and yet I spotted him in a moment. And think of the affectation of his dinners in Queen's-square. Pah! And the blind governess too, who ought to have been buried in a cross-road, if they had found her," added Mr. Stingray, reflectively. "How that woman hated me, because I saw through their upstart pretensions, and now the male beauty has come to this—a hole in the elbow of his sleeve, and

a red herring for supper and dinner too, I shouldn't wonder! Some day he will be buried—if he is buried at all—at the parish expense. I should like to know when he does go off the hooks, and then I'll work the story up in a novel. I declare I never felt more disgusted in my life to think that I should actually have been once on friendly terms with a disreputable cadger in Tottenham Court-road. And the beggar refused my bounty! I really would have stood a sovereign to hear how he contrived to come down in the world so rapidly. He'll never get such another chance. If he had a wife or children to maintain, he wouldn't be quite so impertinent, I fancy. That's what fetches all the nonsense out of a scamp like that. This precious fellow used, when he had the money, to spoil cabmen by giving them more than their fares. He was the organ-grinder's friend, and liked to encourage street-begging. I should think he must have had a prophetic eye to his own future. Only to think that a year ago this beggar and his wife gave themselves airs of exclusiveness. And now where are they? Ha! ha! It's positively delicious. Whatever did that rogue Cousens mean by saying that he had died in a printing-house in New York? What a story for the 'Kemble!' Ho! ho!"

Thus talking to himself, the "great, good, and genial philanthropist," as he has been called, stalked on chuckling over Aubrey's fall.

"*Facilissimus descensus*," he said, as he ran down a small pleasure craft with his bulky hull.

"Mind where yer goin' to, you ugly old beast!" was the fair one's angry remark.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said the philosopher, bowing with mock courtesy.

"Look how you've tore my dress. You must give me and my friend a glass of wine."

"With pleasure," said the cynic.

"I say, Jem," said one of four gents, passing arm-in-arm, to one of his friends, "d'ye know who that cove is? He's the President of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. I say, guv'nor, mind what you're after, you know."

A shower of jeers followed Mr. Stingray and his convoy to the nearest public-house. This was a kind of thing in which the cynic often indulged with impunity. He was only studying "life." Does any one think it is cruelty, or bare curiosity, which leads the great and gushing Mr. Granville Smith to an execution? Certainly not. It is in order to describe the horrors of the scene with due effect, and in a chef d'œuvre of Dutch word-painting, culminating in melodramatic maudlin, to recommend the abolition of capital punishment, and put a premium upon murder. By mixing freely with a certain class of society, Stingray had been enabled to pen his celebrated "Hay-market Gleanings," which led to the transference of more arbitrary power to the coarse hands of a brutal Police. Any low Irish ruffian in uniform was thereby enabled to maul and despitefully abuse a shrinking and delicate female, to bruise her body, tear her clothes, dislocate her fingers, wrists, or arms, fracture her skull, lock her up, and even *kill* her with impunity; for no offence whatever, save one of which magistrates, legislators, ministers of state, and

even royal personages of the male sex are equally, if not far more guilty, in the sight at least of Heaven. If, occasionally, a respectable young woman falls a victim to this brutality, constant remands and hard swearing, a magisterial Lord Angelo and forged evidence, at least assure the impunity of the assailants.

Stingray had jested and drunk his champagne with the incumbent of a saloon in the Haymarket—nay, paid his full tribute of compliments and gallantries over the bar-counter to the presiding dame, and the next day written a sensational article in a daily journal, branding the whole concern as a terrible haunt of iniquity, to be put down with the strong arm of the law. This was not the act even of a gentlemanly fiend! It was a sample of the satire, the honour, the principle, the chivalry of the nineteenth century, the age of false success, the reign of moral and physical adulteration, when a myriad Mammon rises everywhere and pushes Simplicity and Truth from their stools, strips the fillet from the eyes of Justice to discover the hideous squint behind, and makes earth a rogue's paradise and gilded pleasure-garden, when villany and vice hold a continual masked carnival of unimpassioned ruffianism and commercial crime!

Any petty Pontius Pilate of a police court will call this senseless raving. So is every truth, according to the fiat of the day. The Cervantes to restore chivalry has yet to appear. We do not now call a windmill a giant; but we call a factory "progress," and a great slop-selling establishment "in-

tegrity." A successful swindle is "eminent respectability." A man of enormous wealth may ruin a regiment of honest men's daughters, and yet, if he will but lay the stone of a new church, Morality grasps him by the hand and salutes him as a beneficent Genius of modern life. What were the delusions of him of "La Mancha" compared with the sober enchantments and transformations of a utilitarian age? At least a nobler delusion, a wiser folly, a braver stupidity, a grander mistake!

Aubrey was in the act of entering his miserable abode, when a sickly, delicate creature accosted him with a piteous tale. She had a child in her arms. It looked well, and had a fresh colour, which contrasted with her deadly pallor. As it lay folded in her shawl, it reminded one of a bud half shrouded by a yellow leaf on the stem of a blighted flower.

"I have no money, or I would give it to you," he said, hoarsely and almost angrily.

There is something irritating in the importunity of a beggar, when you cannot relieve the distress which rends a heart acquainted with penury and want to its inmost core. The woman bowed her head over her child, and moved away as if rebuked by a sterner grief. Aubrey turned. He had been accustomed all his life to give, and the mute action of the woman touched him deeply. He beckoned her back.

"Here," he said, "take this; I can do without it." And he gave her all the little marketings he had bought for that night and the Sunday as well. "Stop!" he said, and went up-stairs.

In a few moments he returned. He gave her a few pence; they comprised every coin he had in the world, and shut the door to avoid her thanks.

Let us look at him in his little attic. The moon shone brightly into the room. It was cold; but he did not attempt to light a fire. There was a pallet-bed, on which a rug and some clothes were spread to eke out the scanty allowance of a single blanket and counterpane. There was a deal table and a very humble tea-service for one. There were two chairs, a washhand-stand, a box and portmanteau, a print or two on the walls, and a few books and papers scattered about. He sat down on the bed, with his face hidden in his hands. Then he arose and opened a cupboard in the wall, and took out a fragment of bread and ate, and poured out a glass of water from a jug and drank.

"I shall have nothing," he thought, "to-morrow, nothing. Well, it is not much to suffer." The idea seemed to amuse him, for he laughed a short bitter laugh. "The scoundrel; the wicked old heartless reprobate to stab me thus with his gibes! To think of my being caught by him like a clown at a pantomime who has just plundered a fish-stall! What does it matter? He can but say that I am destitute. At any rate, I ask for assistance from none. Now, then, to work. I must finish that score by Monday." Accordingly, he sat down and worked until his candle got low, when he extinguished it, and looked out upon the innumerable leads, and tiles, and chimney-pots which stretched far away beyond, "It is something like a cemetery," he mused, "only that the living

and not the dead sleep beneath." Then he lit his pipe, and smoked it sadly and thoughtfully, if we can apply such expressions to such an act. What bitter remembrances passed in review! "Is it possible," he groaned, "that I was that man, that idiot, that thrice-sodden fool? I began as others would end, with all that human wishes could desire, and I have lost all. But for the daily struggle, which does not give me time to think, I should end this coil. Had I not met that man, I should hardly have paused to think to-night. I should have been busy with small, mean cares, like a civilised Robinson Crusoe in a crowd. To-morrow, I have but two hours' work. I shall lie in bed: it stops hunger. I remember an Italian exile, a man with a big voice and a figure like Lablache, one whom Nature never meant to grow thin. His remittances failed, or he said so. They always do. I suppose they are intercepted by foreign lawyers or unjust relations. I think he said it was a sister in his case, who had married a Neapolitan count. Nothing could be more natural, than that an exile should cease to receive money. So he ceased to dine. He had run up a score at Cesarini's, and even the macaroni due to him from Nature became an impossibility at last. He used to make wonderful cuttings in black paper, and to teach Italian where he could. But somehow all failed together, remittances, sale of cuttings, and lessons. A lady sent me in search of him. I found him in bed in a lodging close to this very place—Frith-street, I think it was—hollow-eyed, and crying like a huge baby, with a bass voice that shook the room. I asked him what

was the matter. He said he had fever. As I spoke to him he flung aside the coverlet, and displayed his huge torso. He had a wide, red leather belt tightly buckled round his waist.

“ ‘Look here, caro signor,’ he said, as he drew it in, ‘how I am rovinato!’

“ ‘I saw it all at a glance.

“ ‘ ‘I want you,’ I said, ‘to take me to one of your Italian restaurants. I have a fancy for macaroni à l’Italienne.’

“ ‘Before I could prevent it, my huge acquaintance seized my hand and pressed it to his bearded lips, which annoyed me dreadfully at the time.

“ ‘ ‘I have understood,’ he said. ‘You have a good heart, signor. My countryman is not rich; he can give me no more credit. The day before yesterday he said, “Here is your note;” and yesterday I could not return. You are an Englishman! you do not like our macaroni, I know it, but you are an angel for me. Wait!’

“ ‘And he put on his capacious garments, and still looked immense, like a mountain with hollow sides, or an elephant in grief. It ended in my sitting down with a strange lot. There was a silent bearded man, since famous for an act of assassination, a third-rate singer at the Opera, a courier, a violoncello player, a family of acrobats, husband, two brothers, wife, and children, a group of photographic artists, a mysterious elderly foreigner whom I had known for ten years as a frequenter of Regent-street, and had christened ‘the marquis,’ and three vociferous French exiles of the barricades. My poor Signor Ravenna

outdid a juggler in eating his macaroni, and I watched for him to loosen his broad red belt. There was a dandelion salad, I remember, which amused me much; and the dessert placed before each guest reminded me of the sort of mock banquet which children like to make. When Signor Ravenna had got his cup of coffee, and rolled a pinch of tobacco in a small strip of prepared paper out of a little book, between his huge finger and thumb, with a dexterity and fineness of touch that were part and parcel of his vast idiosyncrasy, he was as happy as any foreign gentleman could be in this climate of fog.

“‘You are my protector, my saviour,’ he said. ‘When I get my album returned, which is now with your milord Poggins in the City, a youth most genteel, say I, then I will pray you to accept one, my most beautiful design, the “Judgment of Brutus,” a copy of that which I have presented to the Empress of the French.’

“I remember that a fierce gesture and a muttered remark from the other side the table interrupted us; and shortly after I paid Signor Ravenna’s two months’ dinner score with the bill. It was not much; and he insisted in a few days on presenting me with some really beautiful things, which must have cost him no end of time and trouble. I wonder what has become of him. I shouldn’t mind reversing the order of things, and being his guest now.”

It was a humiliating and melancholy fact; but Aubrey by no means for the first time felt the pangs of absolute hunger. It seemed impossible for a man who had so lately entertained persons of fortune

and title at his own sumptuous table to be reduced to such straits. He might actually at that moment have walked into his West-end club and ordered a luxurious supper. He was still on the books. There were many persons who would have lent or given him a five-pound note, if it were only to purchase future avoidance. But there was a moral barrier which he never attempted to break, even before his clothes grew shabby, and he became a scarecrow in his own thought. The fact, we say, may appear startling and astonishing; but it is no less true. Had he been a fraudulent bankrupt on a large or small scale, it would not have happened. There are contractors whose bills have remained dishonoured, and who have scattered ruin around, who still give their musical parties, and shine magnates of the debatable land between vulgarity and fashion. But then they have settled thousands a year on their wives. There are tradesmen who are ruined periodically, and rise again tricked with new bankruptcy, and flourish in the advertisements of the "Morning Day." There is the insolvent nobleman in Parliament, whose bills are still blown about, and are occasionally discounted after a fashion, in which principal seems to have changed place with interest; and whose small cheques are now and then cashed by some new victim or unwitting admirer of a lord. There are men overwhelmed with debt, and with no ostensible means, who still manage somehow to live on the fat of the land, and to dress with the best, by the aid of fresh relays of long-suffering West-end tailors and bootmakers. How do they manage it? We know not. It would have puzzled Solomon; it

may be clear enough to Phinny Moses, the bill discounter of Bond-street. But Arthur Aubrey was none of these. He was unconditionally ruined. He had near relations enormously rich; but they were very far off from him. These gilded his decline about as usefully and ornamentally, as the rays of Sirius might the shell of a pauper in its rapid progress to the grave.

But, it may be asked, had Aubrey applied to any relative, or friend? If he had not, he could hardly complain; since it is easy in this world to slip out of sight and remembrance, and besides how could they know his situation and need? On one occasion, after writing sixteen hours a-day, i.e., out of the twenty-four, for upwards of a week; after thirty calls at a theatre about a play, which he never had returned to him, and which was subsequently pirated by one of the "dramatic" gang; after incredible exertions to get rid of a literary nugget which no Jew, or Gentile worse than Jew, would purchase; after heart-breaking experiences and disappointments; after seeking in vain any employment, however humble, almost menial, as clerk, secretary, amanuensis, anything by which he might live, he did write three letters to two kinsmen and a *ci-devant* friend. One of the two former never answered him, and the other, whose income was fifty thousand a-year, declined on the plea of the numerous calls upon his purse. The "friend," who, when a minor, Aubrey had assisted with a loan of a thousand pounds, subsequently repaid, three years after, without interest, enclosed him a Post-office order for five pounds,

and said that he would assist him with a small addition to his income, when he, the "friend," could hear that he was in any small permanent employment, and seeking to aid himself in a reputable and solid way. As if he had not sought, poor fellow! The friend in question was a generous man; but he consulted one or two of Aubrey's relatives, and took what he thought was a kind and common-sense view of the matter. He was at first inclined to write a very kindly letter, and to offer to allow him sixty pounds a-year. But the relatives said:

"Depend upon it, so long as he gets any one to assist him, he will do nothing for himself. He will never work, so long as he can manage without it. Let him get an appointment—let us see him doing anything in a regular way, and we will join in aiding him ourselves. You could not do that man a greater unkindness than in sending him money. He always spent and anticipated all he got."

In England people never think of setting a fallen man on his legs. They always wait, for his sake, until he is past the necessity of help or need. They will bestow money on his remains when dead, which they would not give him on principle while living. "Learn to swim!" they say to the drowning wretch. "A plank would be thrown away upon you. It would only encourage you to fall overboard again. When you can swim, we will subscribe for a full-rigged boat." They never think of the petty miseries which occupy the time and thoughts of the man in difficulties, of his shabby attire which prevents him from getting, if not seeking the employment which they so kindly

and thoughtfully recommend. They never think of giving him a chance in life. This is sometimes the excuse of meanness, sometimes the blindness of well-meaning stupidity :

But evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart !

Arthur Aubrey sat gazing out of his attic window, until the chimney-pots seemed to dance a gavotte or fandango, to which a little demon fiddler in his brain played the tune. Then he pressed his forehead against a cold pane of glass, and rose to undress himself before seeking the oblivion of sleep. As he did so, he cried out aloud—"Blanche ! Blanche ! thou art avenged !"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A POCKETFUL OF SOUP.

"Don't tell me," ses I, "as if I wer' a ignoramus and knowed nothink. It's pralylsis as you're a-drivin' at. Appleplexy, indeed! and the party still alive and kickin'! Appleplexy is a single-knock customer, and don't call agen, 'xcept the patient is bled on the spot. Wherever there's appleplexy tellegrafed on the line, you should keep a carvin' knife handy, for leeches is no use; no, no more nor than if they was winkles, though the last is stunnors for a decline. But as for pralylsis, it sometimes only trifles with its wictim, as poor Stevy Greening observed, when his wife's steel busk was melted with lightnin', leavin' her unhurt, and he hadn't to wear no mournin' after all. Pralylsis takes a man by the arm, or the leg, or it'll seize a whole side of him, jest as if you could turn one side of a live hog into bacon without killing the rest of the hanimal. It'll make a clean sweep of memory, or leave any one deaf or speechless, which might be a reckymendation to some married folks as I've met with. It'll double up the strongest man like a pramberlator, and you may knock down a prizefiter as has 'ad it with a full growed baby's coral, or the wind of a parlour bellows hangin' by a clean swep' grate. It'll pull down one side of your mouth, like a guttapershore idiot, which them wagabones pretend to make squeak, with their own noises, in the street, and when you've bought 'em, you're sold; for they've no whistle in 'em at all, and them as sells 'em ought to be took up by the perlice. I tell yer, it'll leave your face like a battered old street cab with one spring broken in the middle of the road, and the winders so tight closed that the party inside can't open 'em to holler out—that's what it'll do," ses I, "as sure as this glass of ale is a-goin' down my throat. As for appleplexy, it's a fool to pralylsis. It's no more nor simple hangin' computed with the tortors of the Spanish Inkisition."—*Leaves from a Bar Parlour*, No. IV.

WE left Aubrey in bed hungry and forlorn, about the small hours of a cold and dreary Sabbath morn-

ing, wondering what the morrow would bring forth, and whether he should receive a small trifle which he expected, or be obliged to pawn some necessary trifle, in order to obtain a meal. He lay there, occasionally dozing, and sometimes painfully awake to his situation, and to the cravings of hunger, until about the fashionable hour of dinner that Sunday evening, when he rose languidly and lighted a fire and made a weak cup of tea without milk, and steeped in it a mouldy crust which he fortunately managed to find, such as any servant would have thrown away, and the proffer of which would not have extracted a wag of the tail from a well-fed hound. About that time a very different scene was being acted at the Bedford Hotel, Brighton, where the great Mr. Grimshaw had taken up his abode for the nonce, or where, to speak more strictly, his abode had been taken for him. In the midst of his greatest success—whilst his colossal fortune was almost doubling itself without assistance in the course of that single year—the great projector and calculator, the man of steel head and iron frame and feet of coal, like the mighty golden idol with clay extremities which Nebuchadnezzar the king set up, over-calculated himself after a plethoric dinner, and was touched on the shoulder by Paralysis, one of the greffiers of the Almighty Creditor, to Whom everything is owed which is lent them to set up in business on the slippery leasehold or tenancy at will of life. Paralysis might have whispered in his ear, had he had the time accorded him to listen,

“I arrest you at the suit of your dead partner whom you robbed, of the poor you have neglected, and the

victims you have swindled. Quick! Come with me to the sponging-house of sickness, where you will remain, until your final imprisonment in the tomb, on which a flattering inscription will record your profession of a Christian faith." But Paralysis was silent on the occasion, and so was Grimshaw ever more. His lips seemed constantly to calculate; and doubtless they did, after a fashion, in polite deference to the habit of his life.

Mrs. Grimshaw had settled her last housekeeper's account, and run up her last milliner's bill for tawdry finery, about a year before. She died of acute fussiness, terminating in carbuncle, on the occasion of the coming of age of the youngest Grimshaw son. The Grimshaws had endeavoured to set up as a county family by virtue of the most overpowering festivities on such occasions, whereat and whereupon the haughty rebuffs which they received from their prouder neighbours only seemed to dispose them to incur fresh insults, in spite of the pain and rage which each successive refusal imposed upon their parvenu pride. Still they had made great progress. Grimshaw could always latterly bring down a lord from town, and he had got into his clutches a county baronet of Norman descent; to whom he had lent money, with the double view of securing such an aristocratic visitor, and getting hold of a valuable royalty on starvation terms. At the marriage of the eldest and plainest Miss Grimshaw to a healthy but needy squire, whose courage at least merited a pleasanter fate, the services of an honourable and reverend clergyman of most disreputable character

were engaged. What mattered his character? He was honourable and reverend in the newspapers and "Court Guide." During his fortnight's stay at the Hall, there was no little scandal incurred—almost too strong for the parvenu family to sustain. A very young visitor at the Hall, son of one of Grimshaw's numerous partners, was pursuing his tender studies under the auspices of a governess. On one occasion the following copy in excellent round-text was found in the child's writing-book, and no one could tell how it came there :

Steam communication corrupts good manners, 1, 2, 3.

We suspect that the honourable and reverend, who was a bit of a wag in his way, could have laid the odds that he would name the writer of the above sentence, which is not altogether unintelligible and devoid of truth, much more easily than he could predict the winner of the ensuing Derby.

As we said, Mrs. Grimshaw died, and was buried with more pomp and ceremony, than had accompanied the death of her mother, or any of her family within the power of tradition to record, if we except her great grandfather, who was said to have been hanged for stealing a donkey. Hence, it was whispered that the Herald's College had supplied a device for her arms, which were quartered with those of her husband, not without some appropriate facetiousness of design. The crest of Mrs. Grimshaw was a wild ass escaping from a lasso, with the motto "Libertas et Justitia," which meant, as some said, that her grand-sire was executed, whilst the ass escaped. It must be

owned that the crest looked something like a pictorial rebus in a penny print. We know one man who explained his own crest, which consisted of an arm and hand holding a torch, by saying that he supposed that one of his ancestors had once fired a hayrick, as the crowning achievement of his life.

Mrs. Grimshaw being thus laid in the "fammerly" vault, as she called it, a maiden sister of Mr. Grimshaw presided at his table and over the deportment of his unmarried daughters, with a severe precision, to which a species of palsy, which caused her continually to nod her head, contributed in a manner "awfully funny," as we once heard a youngster call it, after his first interview with that spinster. And well might he have said so. Mrs. Grimshaw's own hair was red; but red hair continued an abhorred thing long after she was forty. She had at that age, therefore, adopted a wig, the precise fashion of which she had never since seen fit to alter. The style of chevelure being at that period remarkably ugly, it followed that she was unfortunate in the pattern she had chosen. It was a wonderful combination of roll upon roll of large stiff brown curls, which presented the same appearance, as a male "fine 'ead of 'air," as the hairdressers call it, which has just undergone the embellishing infliction of the irons, before it is combed out. Upon this was placed a wonderful superstructure in the shape of a cap, which was graced with such an abundance of bows of ribbons, quillings of blonde and flowers, that it was constantly fluttered with the shaking of the old lady's head. When she wore, on grand occasions, a bird of paradise nestled

on the loftiest summit of her charms, you might have fancied that the bird had lighted on the topmost branches of some lightning-blasted tropical tree—a sort of Eastern elder-berry, if there be such an arboreal eccentricity of vegetation. Imagine all this placed upon a long and scraggy neck, which reminded the beholder of the dirty-white grandmother of all the flamingo tribe, and you have some idea of the appearance to which our schoolboy friend applied the epithet of “awfully funny,” in the modern slang of the period.

This ancient Juno, or rather Diana, we ask pardon of her single state, loved her brother, so far as she could love, and revered him as so great and wealthy an individual merited. When he first succumbed to the stroke, her nods became so rapid and violent, that they seemed to threaten the dislocation of the vertebræ of that elongated neck. When, however, her brother, the head of the family, as she called him with truth, developed the sad symptoms of hopeless imbecility, all the better part of the woman came out, and she nursed and watched over him with untiring tenderness and devotion, not destitute of a certain pathetic dignity in its way. She was altogether the best of the Grimshaw lot; and the only lady-like female, with the exception of the youngest niece, little Violet, that the whole of the two generations could boast. She had carried her brother to Brighton, in the vain hope of benefit accruing to him from the sea air. He slept well, and his appetite was good, and the pair drove out together in a splendid equipage. The vulgar millionaire looked much better, after his calamity

with his placid countenance and white hair, the latter an immediate consequence of the stroke, than ever he had done before.

“What an interesting-looking old gentleman!” the passers-by would say.

The pair are seated opposite to each other at dinner, at the Bedford Hotel. The elder daughters were on a visit, and poor little Violet at school. The table was magnificently furnished, and a butler (no less a personage than the great Binsby himself) and a tall footman stood on either side of his chair on guard, while the hotel servants waited generally at table with noiseless ease. The dull moaning of the sea sounded outside the lofty crimsoned-curtained windows, like the far-off thunder of an approaching host. But a more prosaic and altogether different sort of host presently enters the spacious apartment, in the person of the landlord of the hotel. He bows to the lady, who endeavours to make a distinctive nod, very difficult for her to accomplish, as, with bland and urbane accents, he hopes that everything is served to his distinguished guests’ satisfaction, and expresses his anxiety lest their drive on the west cliff should have proved too cold for the invalid. He leaves with a deep reverence, as he entered, and the service of the dinner begins. The lady nods like a mandarin. “Thank you, no soup, I’m obleeged.” The invalid moves his lips as if in continual calculation of fresh gain, or is it in expectation of his dinner? for, to tell the truth, he was both hungry and cold. Mr. Binsby solemnly arranges a napkin for him under his chin, as a nurse would place a bib round a baby’s neck—a

process by no means unneeded—for Paralysis had left a familiar behind him as custodian of the plutocrat in the person of premature Old Age, and to speak the truth, he drivelled, and his eyes wept involuntarily tears. Then the tall footman lifts the cover off the steaming silver tureen, and stands at attention, and Binsby ladles out a plateful of delicious golden-coloured soup. The invalid sits awhile, moving his lips with a little increased motion, and the old lady nods opposite, attentively regarding every motion of his feeble frame.

“It is too hot, I fear,” she says, in her usual subdued and slightly husky accents.

“It is reyther hot, ma’am,” replies proximious flunkydome in a tone of gentle alarm.

Her brother steals an artful and parrot-like look around. It would be superlatively droll, were it not supremely melancholy to behold. Then he manages to unbutton a pocket of his left trouser, and holds it open with one hand, whilst he takes a spoonful of the hot soup with the other, and endeavours to pour it into the receptacle, which it had been the unceasing toil and object of his life to fill, at least figuratively, with gold. The tall footman turns round, and nearly chokes himself with a napkin. You might have imagined that the hot soup had been, by some mysterious process of magic, conveyed presto into his throat.

The hotel servants turn to the sideboard, and are suddenly very busy with the glasses and spoons. The head-dress of poor Miss Grimshaw is agitated, as if genteel Palsy had suddenly become a ruffian of tre-

mendous violence, and was seeking to twist her neck off, without further extension of leave. Then she half rises from her seat, and two great drops, which might have been tears, roll heavily down her parchment face, as if to water her arid neck. Mr. Binsby alone is equal to the occasion. His face expresses a dignified condolence, which would have become an ancient lord mayor on the announcement of the death of his favourite fool. He gently guides his master's hands one by one to their proper position, and then holds a fresh spoonful of soup to its proper receptacle, where it is duly received. Ancient torture is said to have poured molten gold down the throats of great criminals who had sinned through avaricious greed. The punishment which Grimshaw inflicted on himself was a parody on that practice, as unconscious as it was suggestive. On that day, he had relations actually wanting bread. At that very hour, there was a human being dying just a hundred and fifty yards and ten inches distant, measured by a tape, had it been drawn from the button of his left trouser-pocket to the fluttering heart of the expiring wretch on a heap of straw in the back yard of a neighbouring narrow street. This creature, a woman, had walked from London during the three days previous in search of a person named Smith, at Brighton, whom she could not find. Three days after, a coroner's inquest was held over what had seemed a heap of rags and grey hair to a man who kept a fish-barrow in that yard; and on his entrance to fetch it out, the "body," which had been that of a once stout woman, weighed less than fifty pounds.

This woman, who died on her sixty-ninth birthday, had been a crony of Grimshaw's mother, who married very young, as pit people do, and had nursed him through a dangerous fever when he was six years of age. She had sung the "Pitman's Courtship" over his cradle in his early days.

And now the rough and wintry sea-wind rattled the roof of a pig-sty over her bones. She had more than once appealed to the millionaire for aid, in the earlier days of his prosperity. It is charitable towards that carefully tended victim of paralysis to believe that somehow he had failed to recognise the identity of the applicant.

That day—it was Sunday, O ye anti-recreationists of the poor, who fare sumptuously in purple and fine linen, and sing sacred (?) songs to your grand pianos at home!—the first dawn of success lit up the expressive countenance of Blanche with a smile of enchanting grace. Her maëstro had invited a few connoisseurs to his villa in the outskirts of Rome. The modulation and power of her rich contralto astonished them all. Fat fubsy baritones kissed the tips of their fingers, and threw them open in undisguised admiration, with a gesture such as an Italian can alone master. An old bass singer, with a wonderful shirt-frill, not of the whitest it must be confessed, but that might be owing to the contrast with his hair, kissed her gracefully on both cheeks, and called her his child, and "*la perla d'Inghilterra*," and other pretty names. A youthful tenore woke up the lightly sleeping echoes of the streets with the air of the one English ballad which she sang, and

the raptures of that individual in picturing her to his friends can better be imagined than described. An eccentric English milord, who was one of the favoured few invited, said nothing; but the next day called on the *maestro*; and having as delicately as possible inquired into the circumstances of this English *maraviglia*, placed a thousand pounds at the disposal of the bearded instructor, who lived on something less than a hundred pounds a-year; and to his honour be it said, the gift was as sacredly applied, when his pupil left him, as if it had been intrusted to Aristides or Garibaldi himself. Not a scudo more remuneration, on her leaving him, would that foreign singing-master take on account of this influx of wealth. Yet the only condition of the trust was that she should not know it, until she had finished her course with the professor, and that then she should not be informed whence the donation came.

Verily there is some grand old honesty left in the world, though it is seldom found where it is expected, or furnished to anticipation and belief.

A lady in deep mourning and seclusion has just taken a pretty villa at Bournemouth. Even there she is known for charity and good deeds. When a boat was upset, and three poor fellows drowned, she was the angel of grace in three cottages, and prayed and knelt by the bedside of the dying mother of one, and the sick wife of another, while providing for the five children whom the third left destitute. Who can she be?

The Duke of Chalkstoneville died suddenly. It was said that he had married Miss Dareall; but we

knew that could not be the case. But he left fifty thousand pounds in his will, free of legacy duty, to a young person utterly unknown, save to his confidential legal advisers, and who was named by the euphonious appellation of Martha Grubb.

A coffee-shop was opened in the Whitechapel-road on Christmas Eve, 185—, with the most discordant performance of a brass and string band perhaps ever known even in that locality. It reminded one of the joint performances of several rival orchestras during Greenwich Fair, now happily obsolete, though we cannot see that morals and manners are thereby on the whole much improved. In the pauses of the discord, a singular individual delivered a succession of the most humorous harangues from a window of a first floor, whence the frame had been removed. We will not attempt to do justice to his admired cockneyisms by our spelling, as we are convinced that the effort would be a failure. He announced himself as the benefactor of his species. He was about to bestow on them, at prices ludicrously small, the result of unbounded capital and philanthropical experience. His sherbet would cool the coppers of a salamander; his coffee came direct to him from 'Mesopotammy' from a sheik of the desert, who was his bosom friend. An express train brought him eggs from Dorking, and the fact had created quite a competition among laying hens. He had obtained a private concession from the milky-way; indeed, his milk was all cream, and as for his cream, the only thing he feared was lest the rattling of the omnibuses should turn it into butter, contrary

to the desire of the establishment. Sixteen amateur duchesses made his butter in their country mansions; and the superintendence of baking his fancy rolls employed the leisure hours of an eccentric German prince. Then, like the unveiling of a work of art, a green baize cover was ever and anon drawn aside, and displayed in golden letters such as had never before been surpassed for brilliancy in Whitechapel, the magic letters, "H. Downy, Coffee and Eating-House," and in smaller letters, with flourishes, "Chops and Steaks, Ginger-beer and Soda-water. Sherbet. Beds." The facetious young proprietor—for such he appeared—was attired in a dust-coloured suit of the latest Whitechapel elegance, with a wide-awake of the same colour, ornamented by a wide ribbon of the most gaudy hues, in which half a dozen pheasant's feathers were jauntily stuck, probably to show his connexion with sporting and agricultural life. Whenever a policeman appeared in sight, he became unusually vociferous and cheerful in his remarks. "Walk in, peeler!" he would cry. "This hunique hestablishment closes at eleven, and is licensed by special Hact of Parlyment. Now then, Bobby! vy yer ain't comin' no quicker than if yer vos a lieyer goin' to 'eaven by heasy stages, 'arf a hinch hevery Good Friday, and a million o' miles backerds hevery other day, the precise vay as the badger vent to the Review—my noble connysewer in cold muttin. Valk hin! There's jints as'll be cooked special for hall the Bobbies on the beat, and hextra pretty servant-gals hired to vait on 'em, both on and hoff dooty. Sir Richard Mayne and the Lord Mayor

has sent their compliments, and will dine 'ere on Christmas Day to meet the Prince of Tick. Now, then, mu-sick !”

And then the band would strike up its horrid discord again ; and the facetious proprietor would retire and reappear, glass in hand, to drink the health of a passing omnibus driver, with a perfectly ecstatic series of winks and gestures, amid the cheers of the surrounding mob. Who can this irrepressible and enterprising individual be ? It was at least to be hoped that he would meet with the patronage which he deserves.

And now, once more, let us collect our scattered puppets, and shut them up for another period of four years. Or rather let us leave them at liberty to work out their own destiny in silence, and raise the curtain in due time to display the next tableau of their fate.

END OF VOL. II.

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